

SPUNK

FAQ (I)



PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &
DISCUSSIONS
FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE 'ANARCHIVE'

"Anarchy is Order!"

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by
another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business
is to Create'
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchive' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain

standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

‘Anarchy Is Order’ does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.

Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchivists!!!

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchivists offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”*

(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent to A.O@advalvas.be.

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

WELCOME!!

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SECTION I - WHAT WOULD AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

So far this FAQ has been largely critical, focusing on capitalism, the state, and the problems to which they have led, as well as refuting some bogus "solutions" that have been offered by authoritarians of both the right and the left. It is now time to examine the constructive side of anarchism -- the libertarian-socialist society that anarchists envision.

Therefore, in this section of the FAQ we will give a short outline of what an anarchist society might look like. To quote Glenn Albrecht, anarchists "*lay great stress on the free unfolding of a spontaneous order without the use of external force or authority*" [*"Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development"*, **Anarchist Studies** vol.2, no.2, pp. 110]. This type of development implies that anarchist society would be organised from the simple to the complex, from the individual upwards to the community, the bioregion and, ultimately, the planet. The resulting complex and diverse order, which would be the outcome of nature freely unfolding toward greater diversity and complexity, is ethically preferable to any other sort of order simply because it allows for the **highest** degree of organic unity and freedom. As Kropotkin argued, "*[w]e foresee millions and millions of groups freely constituting themselves for the satisfaction of all the varied needs of human beings. . . All these will be composed of human beings who will combine freely. . . 'Take pebbles,' said Fourier, 'put them in a box and shake them, and they will arrange themselves in a mosaic that you could never get by enstructing to anyone the work of arranging them*

harmoniously." [The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution, p. 11-12] Anarchist opposition to hierarchy is an essential part of a "spontaneously ordered" society, for authority stops the free development and growth of the individual. As Proudhon argued, *"liberty is the mother of order, not its daughter."*

As the individual does not exist in a social vacuum, appropriate social conditions are required for individual freedom (and so subjectivity, or thought) to develop and blossom according to its full potential. The theory of anarchism is built around the central assertion that individuals and their organisations **cannot** be considered in isolation from each other. As Carole Pateman points out, there is *"the argument that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals, and. . .the related argument that the major function of participation is an educative one"* [Participation and Democratic Theory, p. 27]. In other words, freedom is only sustained and protected by activity under conditions of freedom, namely self-government. Freedom is the only precondition for acquiring the maturity for continued freedom.

Thus, a system which encourages individuality must be decentralised and participatory in order for people to develop a psychology that allows them to accept the responsibilities of self-management. Living under capitalism produces a servile character, as the individual is constantly placed under hierarchical authority. Such a situation cannot promote freedom. For under wage labour, people sell their creative energy and control over their activity for a given period. The boss does not just take surplus value from the time employees sell, but the

time itself -- their ability to make their own decisions, express themselves through work and with their fellow workers. Anarchism is about changing that, putting life before the soul-destroying "efficiency" needed to survive under capitalism; for the anarchist *"takes his stand on his positive right to life and all its pleasures, both intellectual, moral and physical. he loves life, and intends to enjoy it to the full."* [Mikhail Bakunin, quoted in **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 118]

Anarchists think that the essential social values are human values, and that society is a complex of associations held together by the wills of their members, whose well-being is its purpose. They consider that it is not enough that the forms of association should have the passive or "implied" consent of their members, but that the society and the individuals who make it up will be healthy only if it is in the full sense libertarian, i.e. self-governing, self-managed, and directly democratic. This implies not only that all the citizens should have a "right" to influence its policy if they so desire, but that the greatest possible opportunity should be afforded for every citizen to exercise this right. Anarchism involves an active, not merely passive, citizenship on the part of society's members and holds that this principle is not only applied to some "special" sphere of social action called "politics" but to any and every form of social action, including economic activity.

So, as will be seen, the key concept underlying both the social/political and the economic structure of libertarian socialism is *"self-management,"* a term that implies not only workers control of their workplaces but also citizens' control of their communities (where it becomes *"self-government"*), through direct democracy and

voluntary federation. Thus self-management is the positive implication of anarchism's "negative" principle of opposition to hierarchical authority. For through self-management, hierarchical authority is dissolved, as self-managing workers' councils and community assemblies are decentralized, "horizontal" organizations in which each participant has an equal voice in the decisions that affect his or her life, instead of merely following orders and being governed by others. Self-management, therefore, is the essential condition for a world in which individuals will be free to follow their own dreams, in their own ways, cooperating together as equals without interference from any form of authoritarian power (such as government or boss).

Perhaps needless to say, this section is intended as a heuristic device only, as a way of helping readers envision how anarchist principles might be embodied in practice, but not as a definitive statement of how they **must** be embodied. The idea that a few people could determine exactly what a free society would look like is contrary to the anarchist principles of free growth and thought, and is far from our intention. Here we simply try to indicate some of the structures that an anarchist society may contain, based on the few examples of anarchy in action that have existed and our critical evaluation of their limitations and successes. Of course, as such a society will not be created overnight or without links to the past, and so it will initially include structures created in social struggle and will be marked with the ideas that inspired and developed within that struggle. For example, the anarchist collectives in Spain were organised in a bottom-up manner, similar to the way the CNT (the anarcho-syndicalist labor union) was organised before the revolution.

This means that how an anarchist society would look like and work is not independent of the means used to create it. In other words, an anarchist society will reflect the social struggle which preceded it and the ideas which existed within that struggle. Therefore the vision of a free society indicated in this section of the FAQ is not some sort of abstraction which will be created overnight. If anarchists did think that then they would rightly be called utopian. No, an anarchist society is the outcome of activity and social struggle, struggle which helps to create a mass movement which contains individuals who can think for themselves and are willing and able to take responsibility for their own lives (see section J - ["What do anarchists do?"](#)).

So, when reading this section please remember that this is not a blue print but only one possible suggestion of what anarchy would look like. It is designed to provoke thought and indicate that an anarchist society is possible and that such a society is the product of our activity in the here and now.

I.1 ISN'T LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM AN OXYMORON?

No. As discussed in [section A.1.3](#), the word "libertarian" has been used by anarchist socialists for far longer than the pro-free market right have been using it. This in itself does not, of course, prove that the term is free of contradiction. However, as we will show below, the claim that the term is self-contradictory rests on the assumption that socialism requires the state in order to exist and that socialism is incompatible with liberty. This assumption, as is often true of objections to socialism, is based on a misconception of what socialism is, a misconception that many authoritarian socialists and the state capitalism of Soviet Russia have helped to foster. In reality it is the term "state socialism" which is an oxymoron.

The right (and many on the left) consider that, by definition, "socialism" **is** state ownership and control of the means of production, along with centrally planned determination of the national economy (and so social life). This definition has become common because many Social Democrats, Leninists, and other statists **call** themselves socialists. However, the fact that certain people call themselves socialists does not imply that the system they advocate is really socialism. We need to analyse and understand the systems in question, by applying critical, scientific thought, in order to determine whether their claims to the socialist label are justified. As we'll see, to accept the above definition one has to ignore the overall history of the socialist movement and consider only certain trends within it as representing the movement as a whole.

Even a quick glance at the history of the socialist movement indicates that the identification of socialism with state ownership and control is not common. For example, Anarchists, many Guild Socialists, council communists, and other libertarian Marxists, as well as followers of Robert Owen, all rejected state ownership. Indeed, anarchists recognised that the means of production did not change their form as capital when the state took over their ownership, and hence that state ownership of capital was a tendency **within**, not **opposed** to, capitalism (see [section H.2.2](#) for more on this).

So what **does** socialism mean? And is it compatible with libertarian ideals? **Webster's New International Dictionary** defines a libertarian as "*One who holds to the doctrine of free will; also, one who upholds the principles of liberty, esp. individual liberty of thought and action.*" As we discussed earlier, capitalism denies liberty of thought and action within the workplace (unless one is the boss, of course). Therefore, **real** libertarian ideas mean that workers control the work they do, determining where and how they do it and what happens to the fruit of their labour, which in turn means the elimination of wage labour. It implies a classless and anti-authoritarian (i.e. libertarian) society in which people manage their own affairs, either as individuals or as part of a group (depending on the situation). In other words, it implies self-management in all aspects of life.

According to the **American Heritage Dictionary** "socialism" is "*a social system in which the producers possess both political power and the means of producing and distributing goods.*" This definition fits neatly with the implications of the word "libertarian" indicated

above. In fact, it shows that socialism is **necessarily** libertarian, not statist. For if the state possesses the workplace, then the producers do not, and so they will not be at liberty to manage their own work but will instead be subject to the state as the boss. Moreover, replacing the capitalist owning class by state officials in no way eliminates wage labour; in fact it makes it worse in many cases. Therefore "socialists" who argue for nationalisation of the means of production are **not** socialists (which means that the soviet union and the other "socialist" countries and parties are **not** socialist).

Since it's an essential principle of socialism that inequalities of power between people must be abolished in order to ensure liberty, it makes no sense for a genuine socialist to support any institution based on inequalities of power. And as we discussed in [section B](#), the state and the authoritarian workplace are just such institutions. However, the meaning of "equality" has been so corrupted by capitalist ideologues, with their *"ethics of mathematics,"* that "equality" has come to mean "identical." Given the uniqueness of individuals, any attempt to create a society of people who are "equal" in the sense of identical would, of course, not only be doomed to failure but would also create a slave society in the process.

So, libertarian socialism rejects the idea of state ownership and control of the economy, along with the state as such. Through workers' self-management it proposes to bring an end to authority, exploitation, and hierarchy in production. This in itself will increase, not reduce, liberty. Those who argue otherwise rarely claim that political democracy results in less freedom than political dictatorship (although a few "libertarian"

capitalist supporters of the "natural law" dogma effectively do so -- see [section F.7](#)).

The communal ownership advocated by collectivist and communist anarchists is not the same as state ownership. This is because it is based on horizontal relationships between the actual workers and the "owners" of social capital (i.e. the federated communities as a whole), not vertical ones as in nationalisation. In addition, all the members of a participatory anarchist community fall into one of three categories: (1) producers (i.e. members of a collective or self-employed artisans), (2) those unable to work (i.e. the old, sick and so on, who **were** producers), or (3) the young (i.e. those who **will be** producers). Therefore, workers' self-management within a framework of communal ownership is entirely compatible with libertarian and socialist ideas concerning the possession of the means of producing and distributing goods by the producers themselves. Hence, far from there being any contradiction between libertarianism and socialism, libertarian ideals imply socialist ones, and vice versa. As Bakunin argued in 1867, *"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**]. History has proven him correct.

I.1.1 DIDN'T LUDWIG VON MISES'S "*CALCULATION ARGUMENT*" PROVE THAT SOCIALISM CAN'T WORK?

In 1920, von Mises declared socialism to be impossible on the grounds that without private ownership of the means of production, there cannot be a competitive

market for production goods; that without a market for production goods, it is impossible to determine their values; and that without knowing their values, economic rationality is impossible. This is his "*calculation argument*," which "anarcho"-capitalists are fond of claiming is a "proof" that libertarian (or any other kind of) socialism is impossible in principle.

As David Schweickart observes in **Against Capitalism**, however, it has long been recognized that von Mises's argument is logically defective, because even without a market in production goods, their monetary values can be determined. In other words, economic calculation based on prices is possible in a libertarian socialist system. In addition, the Mondragon cooperatives indicate that a libertarian socialist economy can exist and flourish. There is no need for capital markets in a system based on mutual banks and networks of cooperatives. Unfortunately, the state socialists who replied to Mises did not have such a libertarian economy in mind.

In response to von Mises initial challenge, a number of economists pointed out that Pareto's disciple, Enrico Barone, had already, 13 years earlier, demonstrated the theoretical possibility of a "*market-simulated socialism*." However, the principal attack on von Mises's argument came from Fred Taylor and Oscar Lange. (For a collection of their main papers, see **On the Economic Theory of Socialism**, ed. by Benjamin Lippincott, Univ. of Minnesota, 1938.) In light of their work, Frederick Hayek shifted the question from theoretical impossibility to whether the theoretical solution could be approximated in practice. Thus even Hayek, a major free-market capitalist guru, seemed to think that von Mises's argument could not be defended.

Moreover, it should be noted that both sides of the argument accepted the idea of central planning of some kind or another. This means that von Mises's and Hayek's arguments did not apply to libertarian socialism, which rejects central planning along with every other form of centralisation. This is a key point, as most members of the right seem to assume that "socialists" all agree with each other in supporting a centralised economic system. In other words, they ignore a large segment of socialist thought and history in order to concentrate on Social Democracy and Leninism. The idea of a network of "people's banks" and cooperatives working together to meet their common interests is ignored, although it has been a common feature in socialist thought since the time of Robert Owen.

Thus the economic crises of the 1980s in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe do not provide evidence that Mises and Hayek were correct in maintaining that "socialism" cannot be made to work in practice. For as indicated in the [previous section](#), these countries were not socialist at all. Obviously the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries had authoritarian "command economies" with central bureaucratic planning, and so their failure cannot be taken as proof that a decentralized, libertarian socialism cannot work. The latter kind of socialism did in fact work remarkably well during the Spanish Revolution in the face of amazing difficulties, with increased productivity and output in many workplaces (see Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives** and [section I.8](#) of this FAQ).

Finally, let us note that the theoretical work of Schweickart, Engler and others on market socialism shows that von Mises was wrong in asserting that "a

socialist system with a market and market prices is as self-contradictory as is the notion of a triangular square." So far, most models of market socialism have not been fully libertarian, but instead involve the idea of workers' control within a framework of state ownership of capital (Engler is an exception to this, supporting community ownership). However, as we argue in G.4, libertarian forms of market socialism are indeed possible and would be similar to Proudhon's mutualism (as some Leninist Marxists recognise, see **Against the Market** in which the author argues that Proudhon was precursor of the current market socialists).

I.1.2 DOES MISES' ARGUMENT MEAN LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM IS IMPOSSIBLE?

No. While the "*calculation argument*" is often used by right-libertarian's as **the** "scientific" basis for the argument that communism (a moneyless society) is impossible, it is based on certain false ideas of what money does and how an anarchist society would function without it. This is hardly surprising, as Mises based his theory on the "subjective" theory of value and marxian social-democratic ideas of what a "socialist" "economy" would look like. However, it is useful here to indicate exactly why a moneyless "economy" would work and why the "calculation argument" is flawed as an objection to it.

Mises argued that without money there was no way a socialist economy would make "rational" production decisions. Not even von Mises denied that a moneyless society could estimate what is likely to be needed over a

given period of time (as expressed as physical quantities of definite types and sorts of objects). As he argued, *"calculation in natura in an economy without exchange can embrace consumption-goods only."* [**Collectivist Economic Planning**, ed. F.A. Von Hayek, p. 104] Mises' argument is that the next step, working out which productive methods to employ, would not be possible, or at least would not be able to be done "rationally," i.e. avoiding waste and inefficiency. As he argues, the evaluation of producer goods *"can only be done with some kind of economic calculation. The human mind cannot orient itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products and potentialities without such aid. It would simply stand perplexed before the problems of management and location"* [**Op. Cit.** , 103]. Mises' claimed that monetary calculation based on market prices is the only solution.

This argument is not without its force. How can a producer be expected to know if tin is a better use of resources than iron when creating a product? However, Mises' argument is based on a number of flawed assumptions. Firstly, he assumes a centralised, planned economy. While this was a common idea in Marxian social democracy, it is rejected by anarchism. No small body of men can be expected to know what happens in society. As Bakunin argued, it would lead to *"an extremely complex government. This government will not content itself with administering and governing the masses politically. . .it will also administer the masses economically, concentrating in the hands of the State [all economic activity]. . .All that will demand an immense knowledge and many heads `overflowing with brains' in this government. It will be the reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant,*

and elitist of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy. . . Such a regime will not fail to arouse very considerable discontent in the masses of the people, and in order to keep them in check. . .[a] considerable armed force [would be required]." [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p.319] Hence anarchists can agree with Mises: central planning cannot work in practice. However, socialist ideas are not limited to Marxian Social Democracy, and so Mises ignores far more socialistic ideas than he attacks.

His next assumption is equally flawed. This is that without the market, no information is passed between producers beyond the final outcome of production. In other words, he assumes that the final product is all that counts in evaluating its use. Needless to say, it is true that without more information than the name of a given product, it is impossible to determine whether using it would be an efficient utilization of resources. But Mises misunderstands the basic concept of use-value, namely the utility of a good to the consumer of it. As Adam Buick and John Crump point out, *"at the level of the individual production unit or industry, the only calculations that would be necessary in socialism would be calculations in kind. On the one side would be recorded the resources (materials, energy, equipment, labour) used up in production and on the other the amount of good produced, together with any by-products. . . . Socialist production is simply the production of use values from use values, and nothing more"* [**State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, p. 137].

The generation and communication of such information implies a decentralised, horizontal network between

producers and consumers. Therefore, as John O'Neil notes, *"the market may be **one** way in which dispersed knowledge can be put to good effect. It is not... the only way"* [Ecology, Policy and Politics, p. 118]

So, in order to determine if a specific good is useful to a person, that person needs to know its "cost." Under capitalism, the notion of cost has been so associated with **price** that we have to put the word "cost" in quotation marks. However, the real cost of, say, writing a book, is not a sum of money but so much paper, so much energy, so much ink, so much human labour. In order to make a rational decision on whether a given good is better for meeting a given need than another, the would-be consumer requires this information. However, under capitalism this information is **hidden** by the price.

Therefore, a purely market-based system leaves out information on which to base rational resource allocations (or, at the very least, hides it). The reason for this is that a market system measures, at best, preferences of **individual** buyers among the **available** options. This assumes that all pertinent use-values that are to be outcomes of production are things that are to be consumed by the individual, rather than use-values that are collectively enjoyed (like clean air). In other words, prices hide the actual costs that production involved for the individual, society, and the environment, and instead boils everything down into **one** factor, namely price. There is a lack of dialogue and information between producer and consumer. As John O'Neil argues, *"the market distributes a little information and. . . blocks the distribution of a great deal [more]. . . The educative dialogue exists not through the market, but alongside of it"* [Ecology, Policy and Politics, p. 143].

Lastly, Mises assumes that the market is a rational system. As O'Neil points out, *"Von Mises' earlier arguments against socialist planning turned on an assumption about commensurability. His central argument was that rational economic decision-making required a single measure on the basis of which the worth of alternative states of affairs could be calculated and compared"* [Op. Cit., p. 115]. This central assumption was unchallenged by Talyor and Lange in their defense of socialism, meaning that from the start the debate against Von Mises was defensive and based on the argument that socialist planning could mimic the market and produce results which were efficient from a capitalist point of view. Thus, no one challenged Mises' assumptions either about the centrally planned nature of socialism or about the market being a rational system. Little wonder that the debate put the state socialists on the defensive. As their system was little more than state capitalism, it is unlikely they would attack the fundamentals of capitalism (namely wage labour and centralisation).

So, is capitalism rational? Well, it does exist, but that does not prove that it is rational. The Catholic Church exists, but that shows nothing about the rationality of the institution. To answer the question, we must return to our earlier point that using price means basing all decision making on one criterion and ignoring all others. This has seriously irrational effects, because the managers of capitalist enterprises are obliged to choose technical means of production which produce the cheapest results. All other considerations are subordinate, in particular the health and welfare of the producers and the effects on the environment. The harmful effects resulting from "rational" capitalist production methods have long been

pointed out. For example, speed-ups, pain, stress, accidents, boredom, overwork, long hours and so on all harm the physical and mental health of those involved, while pollution, the destruction of the environment, and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources all have serious effects on both the planet and those who live on it.

To claim that prices include all these "externalities" is nonsense. If they did, we would not see capital moving to third-world countries with few or any anti-pollution or labour laws. At best, the "cost" of pollution would only be included in price if the company was sued successfully in court for damages -- in other words, once the damage is done. Ultimately, companies have a strong interest in buying inputs with the lowest prices, regardless of **how** they are produced. As Noam Chomsky points out, "*[i]n a true capitalist society, . . . socially responsible behavior would be penalized quickly in that competitors, lacking such social responsibility, would supplant anyone so misguided as to be concerned with something other than private benefit*" [**Language and Politics**, pp. 300-1]. It is reductionist accounting and its accompanying "*ethics of mathematics*" that produces the "***irrationality of rationality***" which plagues capitalism's exclusive reliance on prices to measure "efficiency." Moreover, the critique we have just sketched ignores the periodic crises that hit capitalist industry and economies to produce massive unemployment and social disruption -- crises that are due to subjective and objective pressures on the operation of the price mechanism.

Under communist-anarchism, the decision-making system used to determine the best use of resources is not more or less "efficient" than market allocation, because it

goes beyond the market-based concept of "efficiency." It does not seek to replace the market but to do what the market fails to do. This is important, because the market is not the rational system its defenders often claim. While reducing all decisions to one common factor is, without a doubt, an easy method of decision making, it also has serious side-effects **because** of its reductionistic basis (as discussed further in the [next section](#)). As Einstein once pointed out, things should be made as simple as possible but not simplistic. The market makes decision making simplistic and generates a host of irrationalities and dehumanising effects.

Sections [I.4.4](#) and [I.4.5](#) discusses one possible framework for a communist economic decision-making process. Such a framework is necessary because *"an appeal to a necessary role for practical judgements in decision making is **not** to deny any role to general principles. Neither...does it deny any place for the use of technical rules and algorithmic procedures...Moreover, there is a necessary role for rules of thumb, standard procedures, the default procedures and institutional arrangements that can be followed unreflectively and which **reduce** the scope for **explicit** judgements comparing different states of affairs. There are limits in time, efficient use of resources and the dispersal of knowledge which require rules and institutions. Such rules and institutions can free us for space and time for reflective judgements where they matter most"* [John O'Neil, **Op. Cit.**, pp.117-118].

As two libertarian socialists point out, *"socialist society still has to be concerned with using resources efficiently and rationally, but the criteria of 'efficiency' and 'rationality' are not the same as they are under*

capitalism." [Buick and Crump, **Op. Cit.**, p. 137] So, to claim that communism will be "more" efficient than capitalism misses the point. It will be "efficient" in a totally different way and people will act in ways considered "irrational" only under the logic of capitalism.

I.1.3 WHAT IS WRONG WITH MARKETS ANYWAY?

A lot. Markets soon result in what are termed "market forces," "impersonal" forces which ensure that the people in the economy do what is required of them in order for society to function. The market system, in capitalist apologetics, is presented to appear as a regime of freedom where no one forces anyone to do anything, where we "freely" exchange with others as we see fit. However, the facts of the matter are somewhat different, since the market often ensures that people act in ways **opposite** to what they desire or forces them to accept "free agreements" which they may not actually desire. Wage labour is the most obvious example of this, for, as we indicated in [section B.4](#), most people have little option but to agree to work for others.

However, even if we assume a mutualist or market-socialist system of competing self-managed workplaces, it's clear that market forces would soon result in many irrationalities occurring. Most obviously, operating in a market means submitting to the profit criterion. This means that however much workers might want to employ social criteria, they cannot. To ignore profitability would cause their firm to go bankrupt. Markets therefore create conditions that compel workers

and consumers to decide things which are not be in their interest, for example introducing deskilling or polluting technology, longer hours, and so on. We could also point to the numerous industrial deaths which are due to market forces making it unprofitable to introduce adequate safety equipment or working conditions, (conservative estimates for industrial deaths in the USA are between 14, 000 and 25, 000 per year plus over 2 million disabled), or to increased pollution and stress levels which shorten lifespans.

In addition, a market-based system can result in what we have termed "*the ethics of mathematics*," where things (particularly money) become more important than people. This can have a de-humanising effect, with people becoming cold-hearted working calculators who put profits before people. This can be seen in capitalism, where economic decisions are far more important than ethical ones. Merit does not "necessarily" breed success, and the successful do not "necessarily" have merit. The truth is that, in the words of Noam Chomsky, "*wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on.*" (Thorstein Veblen elaborated at length on this theme in **The Leisure Class**, a classic analysis of capitalist psychology.) A system which elevates making money to the position of the most important individual activity will obviously result in the degrading of human values and an increase in neurotic and psychotic behaviour.

Any market system is also marked by a continuing need to expand production and consumption. This means that market forces ensure that work continually has to

expand, causing potentially destructive results for both people and the planet. Competition ensures that we can never take it easy, for as Max Stirner argued, *"Restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm enjoyment. We do not get the comfort of our possessions. . . . Hence it is at any rate helpful that we come to an agreement about **human** labours that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil"* [**The Ego and Its Own**]

Value needs to be created, and that can only be done by labour. It is ironic that supporters of capitalism, while usually saying that "work" is and always will be hell, support an economic system which must continually expand that "work" (i.e. labour) while deskilling and automating it and those who do it. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that work need not be hell, and indeed, that when enriched by skills and self-management, can be enjoyable. We go further and argue that work need not take all our time and that **labour** (i.e. unwanted and boring work) can and must be minimised. Hence, while the "anti-work" capitalist submits humanity to more and more labour, the anarchist desires the liberation of "work" and the end of "labour" as a way of life.

In addition, market decisions are crucially conditioned by the purchasing power of those income groups that can back their demands with money. The market is a continuous bidding for goods, resources, and services, with those who have the most purchasing power the winners. This means that the market system is the worst one for allocating resources when purchasing power is unequally distributed. This is why orthodox economists make the convenient assumption of a 'given distribution of income' when they try to show that a market-based

allocation of resources is the best one (for example, "*Pareto optimality*").

With the means of life monopolised by one class, the effects of market forces and unequal purchasing power can be terrible. As Allan Engler points out, "*[w]hen people are denied access to the means of livelihood, the invisible hand of market forces does not intervene on their behalf. Equilibrium between supply and demand has no necessary connection with human need. For example, assume a country of one million people in which 900,000 are without means of livelihood. One million bushels of wheat are produced. The entire crop is sold to 100,000 people at \$10 a bushel. Supply and demand are in equilibrium, yet 900,000 people will face starvation*" [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 50-51]. In case anyone thinks that this just happens in theory, the example of African countries hit by famine gives a classic example of this occurring in practice. There, rich landowners grow cash crops and export food to the developed nations while millions starve in their own.

Lastly, there are the distributional consequences of the market system. As markets inform by 'exit' only -- some products find a market, others do not -- 'voice' is absent. The operation of 'exit' rather than 'voice' leaves behind those without power in the marketplace. For example, the wealthy do not buy food poisoned with additives, the poor consume it. This means a division grows between two environments: one inhabited by those with wealth and one inhabited by those without it. As can be seen from the current capitalist practice of "exporting pollution" to developing countries, this problem can have serious ecological and social effects. Far from the market being a "democracy" based on "*one dollar, one vote*," it

is an oligarchy in which (e.g) the 79,000 Americans who earned the minimum wage in 1987 have the same "influence" or "vote" as Michael Milken, who "earned" as much as all of them combined.

So, for all its talk of "invisible hands" and "individual freedom," capitalism ignores the actual living individual in the economy and society. The "individual rights" on which capitalists' base their "free" system are said to be "man's rights," on what "man needs." But "man," after all, is only an abstraction, not a real living being. By talking about "man" and basing "rights" on what this abstraction is said to need, capitalism and statism ignore the uniqueness of each person and the conditions required to develop that uniqueness. As Max Stirner pointed out, "[h]e who is infatuated with **Man** leaves persons out of account so far as that infatuation exists, and floats in an ideal, sacred interest. **Man**, you see, is not a person, but an ideal, a spook." [The Ego and Its Own, p. 79] And like all spooks, it requires sacrifice -- the sacrifice of individuality to hierarchy and authority.

This anti-individual biases in capitalism can be seen by its top-down nature and the newspeak used to disguise its reality. For example, there is what is called "*increasing flexibility of the labor market*." "Flexibility" sounds great: rigid structures are unappealing and hardly suitable for human growth. In reality, as Noam Chomsky points out, "[f]lexibility means insecurity. It means you go to bed at night and don't know if you have a job tomorrow morning. That's called flexibility of the labor market, and any economist can explain that's a good thing for the economy, where by 'the economy' now we understand profit-making. We don't mean by 'the economy' the way people live. That's good for the

economy, and temporary jobs increase flexibility. Low wages also increase job insecurity. They keep inflation low. That's good for people who have money, say, bondholders. So these all contribute to what's called a 'healthy economy,' meaning one with very high profits. Profits are doing fine. Corporate profits are zooming. But for most of the population, very grim circumstances. And grim circumstances, without much prospect of a future, may lead to constructive social action, but where that's lacking they express themselves in violence" [Keeping the Rabble in Line].

This does not mean that social anarchists propose to "ban" the market -- far from it. This would be impossible. What we do propose is to convince people that a profit-based market system has distinctly **bad** effects on individuals, society and the planet's ecology, and that we can organise our common activity to replace it with libertarian communism. As Max Stirner argued, "*competition. . .has a continued existence. . . [because] all do not attend to **their affair** and come to an **understanding** with each other about it. . . .Abolishing competition is not equivalent to favouring the guild. The difference is this: In the **guild** baking, etc., is the affair of the guild-brothers; in **competition**, the affair of chance competitors; in the **union**, of those who require baked goods, and therefore my affair, yours, the affair of neither guildic nor the concessionary baker, but the affair of the **united**"* [Ego and Its Own, p. 275].

Therefore, social anarchists do not appeal to "altruism" in their struggle against the de-humanising effects of the market, but rather, to egoism: the simple fact that cooperation and mutual aid is in our best interests as individuals. By cooperating and controlling "*the affairs*

*of the united," we can ensure a free society which is worth living in, one in which the individual is not crushed by market forces and has time to fully develop his or her individuality and uniqueness. "Solidarity is therefore the state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and wellbeing; and therefore egoism itself, that is the exclusive consideration of one's own interests, impels Man and human society towards solidarity" [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 28].*

I.1.4 IF CAPITALISM IS EXPLOITATIVE, THEN ISN'T SOCIALISM AS WELL?

Some "Libertarian" capitalists say yes to this question, arguing that the labour theory of value (LTV) does not imply socialism but what they call "self-managed" capitalism. This, however, is not a valid inference. The LTV can imply both socialism (selling the product of one's labour) and communism (distribution according to needs). The theory is a critique of capitalism, not necessarily the basis of a socialist economy, although it **can** be considered this as well. For example, Proudhon used the LTV as the foundation of his proposals for mutual banking and cooperatives, while Robert Owen used it as the basis of his system of labour notes. Though a system of cooperative selling on the market or exchanging labour-time values would not be communism, it is **not** capitalism, because the workers are not separated from the means of production. Therefore, right libertarians' attempts to claim that it is capitalism are false, an example of misinformed insistence that virtually **every** economic system, bar state socialism and feudalism, is capitalist. Some libertarian

Marxists claim, similarly, that non-communist forms of socialism are just "self-managed" capitalism. Why libertarian Marxists desire to reduce the choices facing humanity to either communism some form of capitalism is frankly strange, but also understandable because of the potential dehumanising effects of market systems seen under capitalism.

However, it could be argued that communism (based on free access and communal ownership of resources) would mean that workers are exploited by non-workers (the young, the sick, the elderly and so on). While this may reflect the sad lack of personal empathy (and so ethics) of the pro-capitalist defenders of this argument, it totally misses the point as far as communist anarchism goes. This is because "*anarchist communism . . . means voluntary communism, communism from free choice*" [A. Berkman, **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 11], which means it is not imposed on anyone but is created and practiced only by those who believe in it. Therefore it would be up to the communities and syndicates to decide how they wish to distribute the products of their labour. Some may decide on equal pay, others on payment in terms of labour time, yet others on communistic associations. We have indicated elsewhere why communism would be in people's self-interest, so we will not repeat ourselves here. The important thing to realise is that cooperatives will decide what to do with their output, whether to exchange it or to distribute it freely. Hence, because it is based on free agreement, anarchist communism cannot be exploitative. Members of a cooperative which is communistic are free to leave, after all. Needless to say, the cooperatives will usually distribute their product to others within their confederation and exchange with the non-communist ones in a different manner. We say

"usually," for in the case of emergencies like earthquakes and so forth the situation would call for mutual aid.

The reason why capitalism is exploitative is that workers **have** to agree to give the product of their labour to another (the boss) in order to be employed in the first place (see [section B.4](#)). Capitalists would not remain capitalists if their capital did not produce a profit. In libertarian communism, by contrast, the workers themselves agree to distribute part of their product to others (i.e. society as a whole, their neighbours, friends, and so forth). It is based on free agreement, while capitalism is marked by power, authority, and the firm hand of market forces. Similarly, capitalism by its very nature, needs to expand into new areas, meaning that unlike socialism, it will attempt to undermine and replace other social systems (usually by force, if history is any guide). As freedom cannot be given, there is no reason for a libertarian-socialist system to expand beyond the effect of a "good example" on the oppressed of capitalist regimes.

I.2 IS THIS A BLUEPRINT FOR AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY?

No, far from it. There can be no such thing as a "blueprint" for a free society. All we can do here is indicate those general features that we believe a free society **must** have in order qualify as truly libertarian. For example, a society based on hierarchical management in the workplace (like capitalism) would not be libertarian, nor would it remain anarchist for long, as private or public states would soon develop to protect the power of those in the top hierarchical positions. Beyond such general considerations, however, the specifics of how to structure a non-hierarchical workplace must remain open for discussion and experimentation.

So, this section of the anarchist FAQ should not be regarded as a detailed plan. Anarchists have always been reticent about spelling out their vision of the future in too much detail. For it would be contrary to anarchist principles to dogmatise about the precise forms the new society must take. Free people will create their own alternative institutions in response to conditions specific to their area, and it would be presumptuous of us to attempt to set forth universal policies in advance. Not only that, given the ways in which our own unfree society has shaped our ways of thinking, it's probably impossible for us to imagine what new forms will arise once humanity's ingenuity and creativity is unleashed by the removal of its present authoritarian fetters.

Nevertheless, anarchists have been willing to specify some broad principles indicating the general framework

within which they expect the institutions of the new society to grow. It is important to emphasize that these principles are not the arbitrary creations of intellectuals in ivory towers. Rather, they are based on the actual political and economic structures that have arisen **spontaneously** whenever the working class has attempted to throw off its chains during eras of heightened revolutionary activity, such as the Paris Commune, the Spanish Revolution, and the Hungarian uprising of 1956, to name a few. Thus, for example, it is clear that democratic workers' councils are basic libertarian-socialist forms, since they have appeared during all revolutionary periods -- a fact that is not surprising considering that they are rooted in traditions of communal labor, shared resources, and participatory decision making that stretch back tens of thousands of years, from the clans and tribes of prehistoric times through the "barbarian" agrarian village of the post-Roman world to the free medieval city, as Kropotkin documents in his classic study **Mutual Aid**.

So, when reading these sections, please remember that this is just an attempt to sketch the outline of a possible future. It is in no way an attempt to determine **exactly** what a free society would be like, for such a free society will be the result of the actions of all of society, not just anarchists. As Malatesta argues, *"None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom coupled by experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there is no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err"* [**Malatesta: Life and Ideas**, p. 49]

I.2.1 WHY DISCUSS WHAT AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY WOULD BE LIKE AT ALL?

Partly, in order to indicate why people should become anarchists. Most people do not like making jumps in the dark, so an indication of what anarchists think a desirable society would look like may help those people who are attracted intellectually by anarchism, inspiring them to become committed as well to its practical realization. Partly, it's a case of learning from past mistakes. There have been numerous anarchistic social experiments on varying scales, and it's useful to understand what happened, what worked and what did not. In that way, hopefully, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

However, the most important reason for discussing what an anarchist society would look like is to ensure that the creation of such a society is the action of as many people as possible. As Errico Malatesta indicated in the middle of the Italian *"Two Red Years"* (see [section A.5.5](#)), *"either we all apply our minds to thinking about social reorganisation, and right away, at the very same moment that the old structures are being swept away, and we shall have a more humane and more just society, open to future advances, or we shall leave such matters to the 'leaders' and we shall have a new government."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 69]

Hence the importance of discussing what the future will be like in the here and now. The more people who have a fairly clear idea of what a free society would look like, the easier it will be to create that society and ensure that

no important matters are left to the "leaders" to decide for us. The example of the Spanish Revolution comes to mind. For many years before 1936, the CNT and FAI put out publications discussing what an anarchist society would look like (for example, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abel de Santallian and **Libertarian Communism** by Isaac Puente). In fact, anarchists had been organising and educating in Spain for almost seventy years before the revolution. When it finally occurred, the millions of people who participated already shared a similar vision and started to build a society based on it, thus learning firsthand where their books were wrong and which areas of life they did not adequately cover.

So, this discussion of what an anarchist society might look like is not a drawing up of blueprints, nor is it an attempt to force the future into the shapes created in past revolts. It is purely and simply an attempt to start people discussing what a free society would be like and to learn from previous experiments. However, as anarchists recognise the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old, our ideas of what a free society would be like can feed into how we organise and struggle today. And vice versa; for how we organise and struggle today will have an impact on the future.

As Malatesta pointed out, such discussions are necessary and essential, for "*[i]t is absurd to believe that, once government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, 'things will look after themselves' without the intervention of those who already have an idea on what has to be done and who immediately set about doing it. . . . [for] social life, as the life of individual's, does not permit of interruption*" [Op. Cit. , p. 121]

We hope that this Section of the FAQ, in its own small way, will encourage as many people as possible to discuss what a libertarian society would be like and use that discussion to bring it closer.

I.2.2 WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO GO STRAIGHT TO AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY FROM CAPITALISM?

Possibly. It depends on the social situation and what anarchists you ask. For example, Bakunin and other collectivists have doubted the possibility of introducing a communistic system instantly after a revolution. Some anarchists, like the individualists, do not support the idea of revolution and instead see anarchist alternatives growing within capitalism and slowly replacing it. For Kropotkin and many other anarcho-communists, communistic anarchy can, and must, be introduced at once in order to ensure a successful revolution.

One thing that all anarchists do agree on is that it's essential for both the state and capitalism to be undermined as quickly as possible. It's true that in the course of social revolution we anarchists may not be able to stop a new state being created or the old one surviving. It all depends on the balance of support for anarchist ideas in the population and how willing people are to introduce them. There is no doubt, though, that for a social revolt to be fully anarchist, the state and capitalism must be destroyed and new forms of oppression and exploitation not put in their place.

Most anarchists, however, agree that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, for to assume so would be

to imagine that anarchists could enforce their ideas on a pliable population. Libertarian socialism can only be created from below, by people who want it and understand it, organising and liberating themselves. The results of the Russian Revolution should have cleared away long ago any contrary illusions about how to create "socialist" societies. The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made by people in liberating themselves are always minor compared to the results of creating authorities, who eliminate such "ideological errors" by destroying the freedom to make mistakes. For freedom is the only real basis on which socialism can be built.

Therefore, most anarchists would support Malatesta's claim that *"[t]o organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves"* [**Malatesta: Life and Ideas**, p. 36]

One thing is certain: an anarchist social revolution or mass movement will need to defend itself against attempts by statists and capitalists to defeat it. Every popular movement, revolt, or revolution has had to face a backlash from the supporters of the status quo. An anarchist revolution or mass movement will face (and indeed has faced) such counter-movements.

However, this does not mean that the destruction of the state and capitalism need be put off until after the forces

of reaction are defeated (as Marxists usually claim). A social revolution can only be defended by anti-statist means, for example arming the people and organising popular militias, as the Mexican, Ukrainian, and Spanish anarchists did.

So, given an anarchist revolution which destroys the state, the type and nature of the economic system created by it will depend on local circumstances and the level of awareness in society. The individualists are correct in the sense that what we do now will determine how the future develops. Obviously, any "*transition period*" starts in the **here and now**, as this helps determine the future. Thus, while social anarchists usually reject the idea that capitalism can be reformed away, we agree with the individualists that it is essential for anarchists to be active today in constructing the ideas, ideals and new liberatory institutions of the future society within the current one. The notion of waiting for the "glorious day" of total revolution is not one held by anarchists.

Thus, all the positions outlined at the start of this section have a grain of truth in them. This is because, as Malatesta put it, "*We are, in any case, only one of the forces acting in society, and history will advance, as always, in the direction of the resultant of all the [social] forces.*" [Op. Cit. p. 109] This means that different areas will experiment in different ways, depending on the level of awareness which exists there -- as would be expected in a free society which is created by the mass of the people.

Ultimately, the most we can say about the timing and necessary conditions of revolution is that an anarchist society can only come about once people liberate

themselves (and this implies an ethical and psychological transformation), but that this does not mean that people need to be "perfect" nor that an anarchist society will come about "overnight," without a period of self-activity by which individuals reshape and change themselves as they are reshaping and changing the world about them.

I.3 WHAT COULD THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

Here we will examine a possible framework of a libertarian-socialist economy. It should be kept in mind that in practice it is impossible to separate the economic realm from the social and political realms, as there are numerous interconnections between them. Also, by discussing the economy first we are not implying that dealing with economic domination is more important than dealing with other aspects of the total system of domination, e.g. patricentric values, racism, etc. We follow this order of exposition because of the need to present one thing at a time, but it would have been equally easy to start with the social and political structure of anarchy.

The aim of any anarchist society would be to maximize freedom and so creative work. In the words of Noam Chomsky, "*[i]f it is correct, as I believe it is, that a fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work or creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive institutions, then of course it will follow that a decent society should maximize the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realized. Now, a federated, decentralized system of free associations incorporating economic as well as social institutions would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism. And it seems to me that it is the appropriate form of social organization for an advanced technological society, in which human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine.*"

So, as one might expect, since the essence of anarchism is opposition to hierarchical authority, anarchists totally oppose the way the current economy is organised. This is because authority in the economic sphere is embodied in centralized, hierarchical workplaces that give an elite class (capitalists) dictatorial control over privately owned means of production, turning the majority of the population into order takers (i.e. wage slaves). In contrast, the libertarian-socialist "economy" will be based on decentralized, equalitarian workplaces ("*syndicates*") in which workers democratically self-manage **socially** owned means of production. Let's begin with the concept of syndicates.

The key principles of libertarian socialism are decentralization, self-management by direct democracy, voluntary association, and federation. These principles determine the form and function of both the economic and political systems. In this section we'll consider just the economic system. Bakunin gives an excellent overview of such an economy when he writes: "*The land belongs to only those who cultivate it with their own hands; to the agricultural communes. The capital and all the tools of production belong to the workers; to the workers' associations . . . The future political organisation should be a free federation of workers.*" [Bakunin on Anarchy, p. 247]

The essential economic concept for libertarian socialists is **workers' control**. However, this concept needs careful explanation, because, like the terms "*anarchist*" and "*libertarian*," "*workers' control*" is also being co-opted by capitalists.

As anarchists use the term, workers' control means collective worker ownership and self-management of all aspects of production and distribution, through participatory-democratic workers' councils, agricultural syndicates, and people's financial institutions which perform all functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, executives, and financiers.

"Workers' ownership" in its most limited sense refers merely to the ownership of individual firms by their workers. In such firms, surpluses (profits) would be either equally divided between all full-time members of the cooperative or divided unequally on the basis of the type of work done, with the percentages allotted to each type being decided by democratic vote, on the principle of one worker, one vote.

Worker cooperatives of this type do have the virtue of preventing the exploitation of wage labor by capital, since workers are not hired for wages but, in effect, become partners in the firm, so that the value-added that they produce is not appropriated by a privileged elite. However, this does not mean that all forms of economic domination and exploitation would be eliminated if worker ownership were confined merely to individual firms. In fact, most social anarchists believe this type of system would degenerate into a kind of *"petty-bourgeois cooperativism"* in which worker-owned firms would act as syndicate capitalists and compete against each other in the market as ferociously as the previously individual capitalists. This would also lead to a situation where market forces ensured that the workers involved made irrational decisions (from both a social and individual point of view) in order to survive in the market. As these problems were highlighted in section I.1.3 (["What's](#)

[wrong with markets anyway?"](#)), we will not repeat ourselves here.

For individualist anarchists, this *"irrationality of rationality"* is the price to be paid for a free market and any attempt to overcome this problem holds numerous dangers to freedom.

Social anarchists disagree. They think cooperation between workplaces can increase, not reduce, freedom. Social anarchists' proposed solution is **society-wide** ownership of the major means of production and distribution, based on the anarchist principle of voluntary federation, with confederal bodies or coordinating councils at two levels: first, between all firms in a particular industry; and second, between all industries, agricultural syndicates, and people's financial institutions throughout the society. As Berkman put it, *"[a]ctual use will be considered the only title - not to ownership but to possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency. Similarly will the railroad brotherhoods run the railroads, and so on. Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit."* [ABC of Anarchism, p. 69]

While, for many anarcho-syndicalists, this structure is seen as enough, many communist-anarchists consider that the economic federation should be held accountable to society as a whole (i.e. the economy must be communalised). This is because not everyone in society is a worker (e.g. the young, the old and infirm) nor will everyone belong to a syndicate (e.g. the self-employed),

but as they also have to live with the results of economic decisions, they should have a say in what happens. In other words, in communist-anarchism, workers' make the day-to-day decisions concerning their work and workplaces, while the social criteria behind these decisions are made by everyone.

In this type of economic system, workers' assemblies and councils would be the focal point, formulating policies for their individual workplaces and deliberating on industry-wide or economy-wide issues through general meetings of the whole workforce in which everyone would participate in decisionmaking. Voting in the councils would be direct, whereas in larger confederal bodies, voting would be carried out by temporary, unpaid, mandated, and instantly recallable delegates, who would resume their status as ordinary workers as soon as their mandate had been carried out.

"Mandated" here means that delegates from workers' councils to meetings of higher confederal bodies would be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the workers they represent on how to deal with any issue. The delegates would be given imperative mandates (binding instructions) that committed them to a framework of policies within which they would have to act, and they could be recalled and their decisions revoked at any time for failing to carry out the mandates they were given. Because of this right of mandating and recalling their delegates, workers' councils would be the source of and final authority over policy for all higher levels of confederal coordination of the economy.

A society-wide economic federation of this sort is clearly not the same thing as a centralized state agency, as in the

concept of nationalized or state-owned industry. Rather, it is a decentralized, participatory-democratic organization whose members can secede at any time and in which all power and initiative arises from and flows back to the grassroots level. Thus Kropotkin's summary of what anarchy would look like:

*"harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. In a society developed on these lines. . . voluntary associations. . . would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent - for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs. Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary - as is seen in organic life at large - harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the state." ["Anarchism", from **The Encyclopaedia Britannica**, 1910]*

If this type of system sounds "utopian" it should be kept in mind that it was actually implemented and worked quite well in the collectivist economy organized during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, despite the enormous obstacles presented by an ongoing civil war as well as the relentless (and eventually successful) efforts of both the Stalinists and Fascists to crush it. (See Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939**, New York: Free Life Editions, 1974).

As well as this (and other) examples of "*anarchy in action*" there have been other libertarian socialist economic systems described in writing. All share the common features of workers' self-management, cooperation and so on we discuss here and in [section I.4](#). These texts include **Syndicalism** by Tom Brown, **The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism** by G.P. Maximoff, **Guild Socialism Restated** by G.D.H. Cole, **After the Revolution** by Abad de Santillan, **Anarchist Economics** and **Principles of Libertarian Economy** by Abraham Guillen, **Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society** by Cornelius Castoriadis among others. Also worth reading are **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics** and **Looking Forward** by Micheal Albert and Robin Hanel which contain some useful ideas. Fictional accounts include William Morris' **News from Nowhere**, **The Dispossessed** by Ursula Le Guin and **Women on the Edge of Time** by Marge Piercy.

I.3.1 WHAT IS A "SYNDICATE"?

As we will use the term, a "*syndicate*" (often called a "*producer cooperative*," or "*cooperative*" for short, sometimes "*collective*" or "*association of producers*" or "*guild factory*" or "*guild workplace*") is a democratically self-managed productive enterprise whose productive assets are either owned by its workers or by society as a whole.

It is important to note that individuals who do not wish to join syndicates will be able to work for themselves. There is no "forced collectivization" under **any** form of libertarian socialism, because coercing people is incompatible with the basic principles of anarchism. Those who wish to be self-employed will have free access to the productive assets they need, provided that they neither attempt to monopolize more of those assets than they and their families can use by themselves nor attempt to employ others for wages (see [section I.3.7](#)).

In many ways a syndicate is similar to a cooperative under capitalism. Indeed, Bakunin argued that anarchists are "*convinced that the cooperative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future, in every branch of labour and science*" [**Basic Bakunin**, p. 153]. Therefore, even from the limited examples of cooperatives functioning in the capitalist market, the essential features of a libertarian socialist economy can be seen. The basic economic element, the workplace, will be a free association of individuals, who will organise their joint work cooperatively.

"*Cooperation*" in this context means that the policy decisions related to their association will be based on the

principle of "one member, one vote," with "managers" and other administrative staff elected and held accountable to the workplace as a whole. Workplace self-management does not mean, as many apologists of capitalism suggest, that knowledge and skill will be ignored and **all** decisions made by everyone.

This is an obvious fallacy, since engineers, for example, have a greater understanding of their work than non-engineers and under workers' self-management will control it directly. As G.D.H. Cole argues, *"we must understand clearly wherein this Guild democracy consists, and especially how it bears on relations between different classes of workers included in a single Guild. For since a Guild includes **all** the workers by hand and brain engaged in a common service, it is clear that there will be among its members very wide divergences of function, of technical skill, and of administrative authority. Neither the Guild as a whole nor the Guild factory can determine all issues by the expedient of the mass vote, nor can Guild democracy mean that, on all questions, each member is to count as one and none more than one. A mass vote on a matter of technique understood only by a few experts would be a manifest absurdity, and, even if the element of technique is left out of account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be neither efficient nor at all a pleasant place to work in. There will be in the Guilds technicians occupying special positions by virtue of their knowledge, and there will be administrators possessing special authority by virtue both of skill an ability and of personal qualifications"* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 50-51]

The fact that decision-making powers would be delegated in this manner sometimes leads people to ask whether a syndicate would not just be another form of hierarchy. The answer is that it would not be hierarchical because the workers' councils, open to all workers, would decide what types of decision-making powers to delegate, thus ensuring that ultimate power rests at the mass base. For example, if it turned out that a certain type of delegated decision-making power was being abused, it could be revoked by the whole workforce. Because of this grassroots control, there is every reason to think that crucial types of decision-making powers with the potential for seriously affecting all workers' lives -- powers that are now exercised in an authoritarian manner by managers under capitalism, such that of hiring and firing, introducing new production methods or technologies, changing product lines, relocating production facilities, etc. -- would not be delegated but would remain with the workers' assemblies.

As Malatesta put it, *"of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc. is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a **raison d'être** for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. . . [However] Government means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement. . .let one not confuse the function of government with that of an administration, for they are essentially different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege"* [Anarchy, pp. 39-40].

What about entry into a syndicate? In the words of Cole, workers syndicates are *"open associations which any man [or woman] may join"* but *"this does not mean, of course, that any person will be able to claim admission, as an absolute right, into the guild of his choice."* [Op. Cit., p. 75] This means that there may be training requirements (for example) and obviously *"a man [or woman] clearly cannot get into a Guild [i.e. syndicate] unless it needs fresh recruits for its work. [The worker] will have free choice, but only of the available openings."* [Ibib.] Obviously, as in any society, an individual may not be able to pursue the work they are most interested (although given the nature of an anarchist society they would have the free time to pursue it as a hobby). However, we can imagine that an anarchist society would take an interest in ensuring a fair distribution of work and so would try to arrange work sharing if a given workplacement is popular.

Of course there may be the danger of a syndicate or guild trying to restrict entry from an ulterior motive. The ulterior motive would, of course, be the exploitation of monopoly power visavis other groups in society. However, in an anarchist society individuals would be free to form their own syndicates and so ensure that such activity is self-defeating. In addition, in a non-mutualist anarchist system, syndicates would be part of a confederation (see section [L.3.4](#)). It is a responsibility of the inter-syndicate congresses to assure that membership and employment in the syndicates is not restricted in any antisocial way. If an individual or group of individuals felt that they had been unfairly excluded from a syndicate then an investigation into the case would be organised at the congress. In this way any attempts to restrict entry would be reduced (assuming they occurred

to begin with). And, of course, individuals are free to form new syndicates or leave the confederation if they so desire (see [section I.4.13](#) on the question of who will do unpleasant work in an anarchist society).

New syndicates will be created upon the initiative of individuals within communities. These may be the initiative of workers in an existing syndicate who desire to expand production, or members of the local community who see that the current syndicates are not providing adequately in a specific area of life. Either way, the syndicate will be a voluntary association for producing useful goods or services and would spring up and disappear as required. Therefore, an anarchist society would see syndicates developing spontaneously as individuals freely associate to meet their needs, with both local and confederal initiatives taking place. (The criteria for investment decisions is discussed in [section I.4.7](#)).

To sum up, syndicates are voluntary associations of workers who manage their workplace and their own work. Within the syndicate, the decisions which affect how the workplace develops and changes are in the hands of those who work there. In addition, it means that each section of the workforce manages its own activity and sections and that all workers placed in administration tasks (i.e. "management") are subject to election and recall by those who are affected by their decisions. (Workers' self-management is discussed further in [section I.3.2](#)).

I.3.2 WHAT IS WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT?

Quite simply, "**workers' self-management**" (sometimes called "**workers' control**") means that all workers affected by a decision have an equal voice in making it, on the principle of "*one worker, one vote*." As noted earlier, however, we need to be careful when using the term "workers' control," as the concept is currently being co-opted by the ruling elite, which is to say that it is becoming popular among sociologists, industrial managers, and social-democratic union leaders, and so is taking on an entirely different meaning from the one intended by anarchists (who originated the term).

In the hands of capitalists, "workers' control" is now referred to by such terms as "participation," "democratization," "co-determination," "consensus," "empowerment", "Japanese-style management," etc. As Sam Dolgoff notes, *"For those whose function it is solve the new problems of boredom and alienation in the workplace in advanced industrial capitalism, workers' control is seen as a hopeful solution. . . . a solution in which workers are given a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice at best secondary in the control of conditions of the workplace. Workers' control, in a limited form sanctioned by the capitalists, is held to be the answer to the growing non-economic demands of the workers"* [*Workers' Control* in **The Anarchist Collectives**, ed. Sam Dolgoff, Free Life Editions, 1974, p. 81].

The new managerial fad of "quality circles" -- meetings where workers are encouraged to contribute their ideas on how to improve the company's product and increase the efficiency with which it is made -- is an example of

"workers' control" as conceived by capitalists. However, when it comes to questions such as what products to make, where to make them, and (especially) how revenues from sales should be divided among the workforce and invested, capitalists and managers don't ask for or listen to workers' "input." So much for "democratization," "empowerment," and "participation!" In reality, capitalistic "workers control" is merely another insidious attempt to make workers more willing and "cooperative" partners in their own exploitation.

Hence we prefer the term "**workers' self-management**" -- a concept which refers to the exercise of workers' power through collectivization and federation (see below). Self-management in this sense *"is not a new form of mediation between the workers and their capitalist bosses, but instead refers to the very process by which the workers themselves overthrow their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace. Self-management means the organization of all workers . . . into a workers' council or factory committee (or agricultural syndicate), which makes all the decisions formerly made by the owners and managers"* [Ibid., p. 81].

Therefore workers' self-management is based around general meetings of the whole workforce, held regularly in every industrial or agricultural syndicate. These are the source of and final authority over decisions affecting policy within the workplace as well as relations with other syndicates. These meetings elect workplace councils whose job is to implement the decisions of these assemblies and to make the day to day administration decisions that will crop up. These councils are directly

accountable to the workforce and its members subject to re-election and instant recall. It is also likely that membership of these councils will be rotated between all members of the syndicate to ensure that no one monopolises an administrative position. In addition, smaller councils and assemblies would be organised for divisions, units and work teams as circumstances dictate.

It is the face-to-face meetings that bring workers directly into the management process and give them power over the economic decisions that affect their lives. In social anarchism, since the means of production are owned by society as a whole, decisions on matters like how to apportion the existing means of production among the syndicates, how to distribute and reinvest the surpluses, etc. will be made by the grassroots **social** units, i.e. the community assemblies (see [section I.5.2](#)), not by the workers' councils. This does not mean that workers will have no voice in decisions about such matters, but only that they will vote on them as citizens in their local community assemblies, not as workers in their local syndicates. As mentioned before, this is because not everyone will belong to a syndicate, yet everyone will still be affected by economic decisions of the above type. This is an example of how the social/political and economic structures of social anarchy are intertwined.

I.3.3 WHAT ROLE DO SYNDICATES PLAY IN THE "ECONOMY"?

As we have seen, private ownership of the means of production is the lynchpin of capitalism, because it is the means by which capitalists are able to exploit workers by

appropriating surplus value from them. To eliminate such exploitation, anarchists propose that social capital -- productive assets such as factories and farmland -- be owned by society as a whole and shared out among syndicates and self-employed individuals by directly democratic methods, through face-to-face voting of the whole electorate in local neighbourhood and community assemblies, which will be linked together through voluntary federations. It does **not** mean that the state owns the means of production, as under Marxism-Leninism or social democracy, because there is no state under libertarian socialism. (For more on neighbourhood and community assemblies, see sections [I.5.2](#) and [I.5.3](#)).

Production for use rather than profit is the key concept that distinguishes collectivist and communist forms of anarchism from market socialism or from the competitive forms of mutualism advocated by Proudhon and the individualist anarchists. Under mutualism, workers organize themselves into syndicates, but ownership of a syndicate's capital is limited to its workers rather than resting with the whole society. Under most versions of market socialism, the state owns the social capital but the syndicates use it to pursue profits, which are retained by and divided among the members of the individual syndicates. Thus both mutualism and market socialism are forms of "petty-bourgeois cooperativism" in which the worker-owners of the cooperatives function as collective "capitalists", competing in the marketplace with other cooperatives for customers, profits, raw materials, etc. -- a situation that gives rise to many of the same problems that arise under capitalism (see [section H.4](#)).

In contrast, within anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism, society as a whole owns the social capital, which allows for the elimination of both competition for profits and the tendency for workers to develop a proprietary interest in the enterprises in which they work. This in turn enables goods to be either sold at their production prices so as to reduce their cost to consumers or distributed in accordance with communist principles (namely free); it facilitates efficiency gains through the consolidation of formerly competing enterprises; and it eliminates the many problems due to the predatory nature of capitalist competition, including the destruction of the environment through the "grow or die" principle, the development of oligopolies from capital concentration and centralization, and the business cycle, with its periodic recessions and depressions.

For social anarchists, therefore, libertarian socialism is based on decentralised decisionmaking within the framework of communally-owned but independently-run and worker-self-managed syndicates (or cooperatives).

In other words, the economy is communalised, with land and the means of production being turned into communal "property." The community determines the social and ecological framework for production while the workforce makes the day-to-day decisions about what to produce and how to do it. This is because a system based purely on workplace assemblies effectively disenfranchises those individuals who do not work but live with the effects of production (e.g., ecological disruption). In Howard Harkins' words, *"the difference between workplace and community assemblies is that the internal dynamic of direct democracy in communities gives a hearing to solutions that bring out the common*

ground and, when there is not consensus, an equal vote to every member of the community." ["Community Control, Workers' Control and the Cooperative Commonwealth", pp. 55-83, **Society and Nature** No. 3, p. 69]

This means that when a workplace joins a confederation, that workplace is communalised as well as confederated. In this way, workers' control is placed within the broader context of the community, becoming an aspect of community control. This does not mean that workers' do not control what they do or how they do it. Rather, it means that the framework within which they make their decisions is determined by the community. For example, the local community may decide that production should maximise recycling and minimise pollution, and workers informed of this decision make investment and production decisions accordingly. In addition, consumer groups and cooperatives may be given a voice in the confederal congresses of syndicates or even in the individual workplaces (although it would be up to local communities to decide whether this would be practical or not).

Given the general principle of social ownership and the absence of a state, there is considerable leeway regarding the specific forms that collectivization might take -- for example, in regard to methods of surplus distribution, the use or non-use of money, etc. -- as can be seen by the different systems worked out in various areas of Spain during the Revolution of 1936-39 (as described, for example, in Sam Dolgoff's **The Anarchist Collectives**).

Nevertheless, democracy is undermined when some communities are poor while others are wealthy.

Therefore the method of surplus distribution must insure that all communities have an adequate share of pooled revenues and resources held at higher levels of confederation as well as guaranteed minimum levels of public services and provisions to meet basic human needs.

I.3.4 WHAT RELATIONS WOULD EXIST BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL SYNDICATES?

Just as individuals associate together to work on and overcome common problems, so would syndicates. Few, if any workplaces are totally independent of others, but require raw materials as inputs and consumers for their products. Therefore there will be links between different syndicates. These links are twofold: firstly, free agreements between individual syndicates, and secondly, confederations of syndicates (within branches of industry and regionally). Let's consider free agreement first.

Anarchists recognise the importance of letting people organise their own lives. This means that they reject central planning and instead urge direct links between workers' associations. Those directly involved in production know their needs far better than any bureaucrat. Therefore anarchists think that "*[i]n the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters!] to produce . . . all that was necessary for life, driven by no other force than his desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and cooperates and enters into agreements with others because by so doing it extends its own possibilities.*" [George Barret, **The Anarchist**

Revolution, p. 18] An example of one such agreement would be orders for products and services.

This suggests a decentralised economy -- even more decentralised than capitalism (which is "decentralized" only in capitalist mythology, as shown by big business and transnational corporations, for example) -- one *"growing ever more closely bound together and interwoven by free and mutual agreements."* [**Ibid.**, p. 18] For social anarchists, this would take the form of *"free exchange without the medium of money and without profit, on the basis of requirement and the supply at hand."* [Alexander Berkman, **ABC of Anarchism**, p. 69]

Therefore, an anarchist economy would be based on spontaneous order as workers practiced mutual aid and free association. The anarchist economy *"starts from below, not from above. Like an organism, this free society grows into being from the simple unit up to the complex structure. The need for . . . the individual struggle for life . . . is . . . sufficient to set the whole complex social machinery in motion. Society is the result of the individual struggle for existence; it is not, as many suppose, opposed to it."* [G. Barret, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

In other words, *"[t]his factory of ours is, then, to the fullest extent consistent with the character of its service, a self-governing unit, managing its own productive operations, and free to experiment to the heart's content in new methods, to develop new styles and products. . . This autonomy of the factory is the safeguard. . . against the dead level of mediocrity, the more than adequate substitute for the variety which the competitive motive was once supposed to stimulate, the guarantee of*

liveliness, and of individual work and workmanship."
[G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 59]

This brings us to the second form of relationships between syndicates, namely confederations of syndicates. If individual or syndicate activities spread beyond their initial locality, they would probably reach a scale at which they would need to constitute a confederation. At this scale, industrial confederations of syndicates are necessary to aid communication between workplaces who produce the same goods. No syndicate exists in isolation, and so there is a real need for a means by which syndicates can meet together to discuss common interests and act on them.

A confederation of syndicates (called a "*guild*" by some libertarian socialists, or "*industrial union*" by others) works on two levels: within an industry and across industries. The basic operating principle of these confederations is the same as that of the syndicate itself - voluntary cooperation between equals in order to meet common needs. In other words, each syndicate in the confederation is linked by horizontal agreements with the others, and none owe any obligations to a separate entity above the group (see section A.11, ["Why are anarchists in favour of direct democracy?"](#) for more on the nature of anarchist confederation).

As such, the confederations reflect anarchist ideas of free association and decentralised organisation as well as concern for practical needs:

"Anarchists are strenuously opposed to the authoritarian, centralist spirit . . . So they picture a future social life in the basis of federalism, from the

individual to the municipality, to the commune, to the region, to the nation, to the international, on the basis of solidarity and free agreement. And it is natural that this ideal should be reflected also in the organisation of production, giving preference as far as possible, to a decentralised sort of organisation; but this does not take the form of an absolute rule to be applied in every instance. A libertarian order would be in itself, on the other hand, rule out the possibility of imposing such a unilateral solution." [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific Communism'", pp. 13-49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed), p. 23]

As would be imagined, these confederations are voluntary associations and "*Just as factory autonomy is vital in order to keep the Guild system alive and vigorous, the existence of varying democratic types of factories in independence of the National Guilds may also be a means of valuable experiment and fruitful initiative of individual minds. In insistently refusing to carry their theory to its last 'logical' conclusion, the Guildsman [and anarchists] are true to their love of freedom and varied social enterprise.*" [G.D.H. Cole, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65]

If a workplace agrees to confederate, then it gets to share in the resources of the confederation and so gains the benefits of mutual aid. In return for the benefits of confederal cooperation, the syndicate's tools of production become the "property" of society, to be used but not owned by those who work in them. This does not mean centralised control from the top, for "*when we say that ownership of the tools of production, including the factory itself, should revert to the corporation [i.e. confederation] we do not mean that the workers in the*

individual workshops will be ruled by any kind of industrial government having power to do what it pleases with [them]. . . . No, the workers. . .[will not] hand over their hard-won control. . . to a superior power. . . . What they will do is. . . to guarantee reciprocal use of their tools of production and accord their fellow workers in other factories the right to share their facilities [and vice versa]. . .with [all] whom they have contracted the pact of solidarity." [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 363-364]

Facilitating this type of cooperation is the major role of inter-industry confederations, which also ensure that when the members of a syndicate change work to another syndicate in another (or the same) branch of industry, they have the same rights as the members of their new syndicate. In other words, by being part of the confederation, a worker ensures that s/he has the same rights and an equal say in whatever workplace is joined. This is essential to ensure that a cooperative society remains cooperative, as the system is based on the principle of "*one person, one vote*" by all those involved in the work process.

So, beyond this reciprocal sharing, what other roles does the confederation play? Basically, there are two. Firstly, the sharing and coordination of information produced by the syndicates (as will be discussed in [section I.3.5](#)), and, secondly, determining the response to the changes in production and consumption indicated by this information. As the "vertical" links between syndicates are non-hierarchical, each syndicate remains self-governing. This ensures decentralisation of power and direct control, initiative, and experimentation by those involved in doing the work. Hence, "*the internal*

organisation [of one syndicate] ... need not be identical [to others]: Organisational forms and procedures will vary greatly according to the preferences of the associated workers" [Ibid., p. 361]. In practice, this would probably mean that each syndicate gets its own orders and determines the best way to satisfy them (i.e. manages its own work and working conditions).

As indicated above, free agreement will ensure that customers would be able to choose their own suppliers, meaning that production units would know whether they were producing what their customers wanted, i.e., whether they were meeting social need as expressed through demand. If they were not, customers would go elsewhere, to other production units within the same branch of production. However, the investment response to consumer actions would be coordinated by a confederation of syndicates in that branch of production. By such means, the confederation can ensure that resources are not wasted by individual syndicates over-producing goods or over-investing in response to changes in production (see [section I.3.5](#)).

It should be pointed out that these confederated investment decisions will exist along with the investments associated with the creation of new syndicates, plus internal syndicate investment decisions. We are not suggesting that **every** investment decision is to be made by the confederations. (This would be particularly impossible for **new** industries, for which a confederation would not exist!) Therefore, in addition to coordinated production units, an anarchist society would see numerous small-scale, local activities which would ensure creativity, diversity, and flexibility. Only after

these activities had spread across society would confederal coordination become necessary.

Thus, investment decisions would be made at congresses and plenums of the industry's syndicates, by a process of horizontal, negotiated coordination. This model combines "planning" with decentralisation. Major investment decisions are coordinated at an appropriate level, with each unit in the confederation being autonomous, deciding what to do with its own productive capacity in order to meet social demand. Thus we have self-governing production units coordinated by confederations (horizontal negotiation), which ensures local initiative (a vital source of flexibility, creativity, and diversity) and a rational response to changes in social demand.

It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution syndicates organised themselves very successfully as town-wide industrial confederations of syndicates. These were based on the town-level industrial confederation getting orders for products for its industry and allocating work between individual workplaces (as opposed to each syndicate receiving orders for itself). Gaston Leval noted that this form of organisation (with increased responsibilities for the confederation) did not harm the libertarian nature of anarchist self-management:

"Everything was controlled by the syndicates. But it must not therefore be assumed that everything was decided by a few higher bureaucratic committees without consulting the rank and file members of the union. Here libertarian democracy was practised. As in the CNT there was a reciprocal double structure; from the grass roots at the base. . . upwards, and in the other direction a reciprocal

influence from the federation of these same local units at all levels downwards, from the source back to the source." [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 105]

Such a solution, or similar ones, may be more practical in some situations than having each syndicate receive its own orders and so anarchists do not reject such confederal responsibilities out of hand (although the general prejudice is for decentralisation). This because we *"prefer decentralised management; but ultimately, in practical and technical problems, we defer to free experience."* [Luigi Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] The specific form of organisation will obviously vary as required from industry to industry, area to area, but the underlying ideas of self-management and free association will be the same. Moreover, in the words of G.D.H Cole, the *"essential thing. . . is that its [the confederation or guild] function should be kept down to the minimum possible for each industry."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61]

I.3.5 WHAT WOULD CONFEDERATIONS OF SYNDICATES DO?

Voluntary confederation among syndicates is required in order to decide on the policies governing relations between syndicates and to coordinate their activities. There are two basic kinds of confederation: within all workplaces of a certain type, and within the whole economy (the federation of all syndicates). Both would operate at different levels, meaning there would be confederations for both industrial and inter-industrial associations at the local and regional levels and beyond. The basic aim of this inter-industry and cross-industry

networking is to ensure that the relevant information is spread across the various elemental parts of the economy so that each can effectively coordinate its plans with the others. By communicating across workplaces, people can overcome the barriers to coordinating their plans which one finds in market systems (see [section C.7.1](#)) and so avoid the economic and social disruptions associated with capitalism.

However, it is essential to remember that each syndicate within the confederation is autonomous. The confederations seek to coordinate activities of joint interest (in particular investment decisions for new plant and the rationalisation of existing plant in light of reduced demand). They do not determine what work a syndicate does or how they do it. As Kropotkin argues (based on his firsthand experience of Russia under Lenin), *"[n]o government would be able to organize production if the workers themselves through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee. It is certainly impossible to foresee everything. Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can cooperate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs."* [Revolutionary Pamphlets, pp. 76-77]

Thus Coles statement:

"With the factory thus largely conducting its own concerns, the duties of the larger Guild organisations [i.e confederations] would be mainly those of coordination, or regulation, and of representing the Guild in its external relations. They would, where it was

necessary, co-ordinate the production of various factories, so as to make supply coincide with demand. . . they would organise research . . . This large Guild organisation. . . must be based directly on the various factories included in the Guild." [**Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 59-60]

So it is important to note that the lowest units of confederation -- the workers' councils -- will control the higher levels, through their power to elect mandated and recallable delegates to meetings of higher confederal units. "Mandated" means that the delegates will go to the meeting of the higher confederal body with specific instructions on how to vote on a particular issue, and if they do not vote according to that mandate they will be recalled and the results of the vote nullified. Delegates will be ordinary workers rather than paid representatives or union leaders, and they will return to their usual jobs as soon as the mandate for which they have been elected has been carried out. In this way, decision-making power remains with the workers' councils and does not become concentrated at the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy in an elite class of professional administrators or union leaders. For the workers' councils will have the final say on **all** policy decisions, being able to revoke policies made by those with delegated decision-making power and to recall those who made them:

"When it comes to the material and technical method of production, anarchists have no preconceived solutions or absolute prescriptions, and bow to what experience and conditions in a free society recommend and prescribe. What matters is that, whatever the type of production adopted, it should be the free choice of the producers themselves, and cannot possibly be imposed,

*any more than any form is possible of exploitations of another's labour . . . Anarchists do not *a priori* exclude any practical solution and likewise concede that there may be a number of different solutions at different times. . ."* [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific Communism'", pp. 13-49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed), p. 22]

Confederations (negotiated-coordination bodies) would, therefore, be responsible for clearly defined branches of production, and in general, production units would operate in only one branch of production. These confederations would have direct links to other confederations and the relevant communal confederations, which supply the syndicates with guidelines for decision making (as will be discussed in [section I.4.4](#)) and ensure that common problems can be highlighted and discussed. These confederations exist to ensure that information is spread between workplaces and to ensure that the industry responds to changes in social demand. In other words, these confederations exist to coordinate new investment decisions (i.e. if demand exceeds supply) and to determine how to respond if there is excess capacity (i.e. if supply exceeds demand).

In this way, the periodic crises of capitalism based on over-investment and over-production (followed by depression) and their resulting social problems can be avoided and resources efficiently and effectively utilised. In addition, production (and so the producers) can be freed from the centralised control of both capitalist and state hierarchies.

However, it could again be argued that these confederations are still centralised and that workers

would still be following orders coming from above. This is incorrect, for any decisions concerning an industry or plant are under the direct control of those involved. For example, the steel industry confederation may decide to rationalise itself at one of its congresses. Murray Bookchin sketches the response to this situation as follows: "*[L]et us suppose that a board of highly qualified technicians is established [by this congress] to propose changes in the steel industry. This board. . . advances proposals to rationalise the industry by closing down some plants and expanding the operation of others. . . . Is this a 'centralised' body or not? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, only in the sense that the board is dealing with problems that concern the country as a whole; no, because it can make no decision that **must** be executed for the country as a whole. The board's plan must be examined by all the workers in the plants [that are affected]. . . . The board itself has no power to enforce 'decisions'; it merely makes recommendations. Additionally, its personnel are controlled by the plant in which they work and the locality in which they live*" [Post Scarcity Anarchism, p. 267].

Therefore, confederations would not be in positions of power over the individual syndicates. As Bookchin points out, "*They would have no decision-making powers. The adoption, modification or rejection of their plans would rest entirely with the communities involved.*" [Op. Cit., p. 267]. No attempt is made to determine which plants produce which steel for which customers in which manner. Thus, the confederations of syndicates ensure a decentralised, spontaneous economic order without the negative side-effects of capitalism (namely power concentrations within firms and in the market, periodic crises, etc.).

As one can imagine, an essential feature of these confederations will be the collection and processing of information in order to determine how an industry is developing. This does not imply bureaucracy or centralised control at the top. Taking the issue of centralisation first, the confederation is run by delegate assemblies, meaning that any officers elected at a congress only implement the decisions made by the delegates of the relevant syndicates. It is in the congresses and plenums of the confederation that new investment decisions, for example, are made. The key point to remember is that the confederation exists purely to coordinate joint activity and share information, it does not take an interest in how a workplace is run or what orders from consumers it fills. (Of course, if a given workplace introduces policies which other syndicates disapprove of, it can be expelled). As the delegates to these congresses and plenums are mandated and their decisions subject to rejection and modification by each productive unit, the confederation is not centralised.

As far as bureaucracy goes, the collecting and processing of information does necessitate an administrative staff to do the work. However, this problem affects capitalist firms as well; and since syndicates are based on bottom-up decision making, its clear that, unlike a centralised capitalist corporation, administration would be smaller.

In fact, it is likely that a fixed administration staff for the confederation would not exist in the first place! At the regular congresses, a particular syndicate may be selected to do the confederation's information processing, with this job being rotated regularly around different syndicates. In this way, a specific administrative body and equipment can be avoided and

the task of collating information placed directly in the hands of ordinary workers. Further, it prevents the development of a bureaucratic elite by ensuring that **all** participants are versed in information-processing procedures.

Lastly, what information would be collected? That depends on the context. Individual syndicates would record inputs and outputs, producing summary sheets of information. For example, total energy input, in kilowatts and by type, raw material inputs, labour hours spent, orders received, orders accepted, output, and so forth. This information can be processed into energy use and labour time per product (for example), in order to give an idea of how efficient production is and how it is changing over time. For confederations, the output of individual syndicates can be aggregated and local and other averages can be calculated. In addition, changes in demand can be identified by this aggregation process and used to identify when investment will be needed or plants closed down. In this way the chronic slumps and booms of capitalism can be avoided without creating a system which is even more centralised than capitalism.

I.3.6 WHAT ABOUT COMPETITION BETWEEN SYNDICATES?

This is a common question, particularly from defenders of capitalism. They argue that syndicates will not cooperate together unless forced to do so, but will compete against each other for raw materials, skilled workers, and so on. The result of this process, it is claimed, will be rich and poor syndicates, inequality within society and within the workplace, and (possibly) a

class of unemployed workers from unsuccessful syndicates who are hired by successful ones. In other words, they argue that libertarian socialism will need to become authoritarian to prevent competition, and that if it does not do so or will become capitalist very quickly.

For individualist anarchists and mutualists, competition is not viewed as a problem. They think that competition, based around cooperatives and mutual banks, would minimise economic inequality, as the credit structure would eliminate unearned income such as profit, interest and rent and give workers enough bargaining power to eliminate exploitation. Other anarchists think that whatever gains might accrue from competition would be more than offset by its negative effects, which are outlined in [section I.1.3](#). It is to these anarchists that the question is usually asked.

Before continuing, we would like to point out that individuals trying to improve their lot in life is not against anarchist principles. How could it be? What **is** against anarchist principles is centralized power, oppression, and exploitation, all of which flow from large inequalities of income. This is the source of anarchist concern about equality -- concern that is not based on some sort of "politics of envy." Anarchists oppose inequality because it soon leads to the few oppressing the many (a relationship which distorts the individuality and liberty of all involved as well as the health and very lives of the oppressed).

Anarchists desire to create a society in which such relationships are impossible, believing that the most effective way to do this is by empowering all, by creating an egoistic concern for liberty and equality

among the oppressed, and by developing social organisations which encourage self-management. As for individuals' trying to improve their lot, anarchists maintain that cooperation is the best means to do so, **not** competition.

Robert Axelrod, in his book, **The Evolution of Cooperation** agrees and presents abundant evidence that cooperation is in our long term interests (i.e. it provides better results than short term competition). This suggests that, as Kropotkin argued, mutual aid, not mutual struggle, will be in an individual's self-interest and so competition in a free, sane, society would be minimalised and reduced to sports and other individual past-times.

Now to the "competition" objection, which we'll begin to answer by noting that it ignores a few key points. Firstly, the assumption that libertarian socialism would "become capitalist" in the absence of a **state** is obviously false. If competition did occur between collectives and did lead to massive wealth inequalities, then the newly rich would have to create a state to protect their private property (means of production) against the dispossessed.

Secondly, as noted in [section A.2.5](#), anarchists do not consider "*equal*" to mean "*identical*." Therefore, to claim that wage differences mean inequality makes sense only if one thinks that "equality" means everyone getting **exactly** equal shares. As anarchists do not hold such an idea, wage differences in an otherwise anarchistically organised syndicate do not indicate a lack of equality. How the syndicate is **run** is of far more importance, because the most pernicious type of inequality from the

anarchist standpoint is inequality of **power**, i.e. unequal influence on political and economic decision making.

Under capitalism, wealth inequality translates into such an inequality of power, and vice versa, because wealth can buy private property (and state protection of it), which gives owners authority over that property and those hired to produce with it; but under libertarian socialism, minor or even moderate differences in income among otherwise equal workers would not lead to this kind of power inequality, because direct democracy, social ownership of capital, and the absence of a state severs the link between wealth and power (see further below).

Thirdly, anarchists do not pretend that an anarchist society will be "perfect." Hence there may be periods, particularly just after capitalism has been replaced by self-management, when differences in skill, etc., leads to a few people exploiting their fellow workers and getting more wages, better hours and conditions, and so forth. This problem existed in the industrial collectives in the Spanish Revolution. As Kropotkin pointed out, *"But, when all is said and done, some inequalities, some inevitable injustice, undoubtedly will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep mire of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 110]

In other words, these problems will exist, but there are a number of things that anarchists can do to minimise their impact. Primarily there must be a "gestation period" before the birth of an anarchist society, in which social

struggle, new forms of education and child-rearing, and other methods of consciousness-raising increase the number of anarchists and decrease the number of authoritarians.

The most important element in this gestation period is social struggle. Such self-activity will have a major impact on those involved in it (see [section J.2](#)). By direct action and solidarity, those involved develop bonds of friendship and support with others, develop new forms of ethics and new ideas and ideal. This radicalisation process will help to ensure that any differences in education and skill do not develop into differences in power in an anarchist society.

In addition, education within the anarchist movement should aim, among other things, to give its members familiarity with technological skills so that they are not dependent on "experts" and can thus increase the pool of skilled workers who will be happy working in conditions of liberty and equality. This will ensure that differentials between workers can be minimised.

In the long run, however, popularisation of non-authoritarian methods of child-rearing and education are particularly important, because as we have seen, secondary drives such as greed and the desire to exercise power over others are products of authoritarian upbringing based on punishments and fear (See sections B.1.5, ["What is the mass-psychological basis for authoritarian civilization?"](#) and J.6, ["What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?"](#)). Only if the prevalence of such drives is reduced among the general population can we be sure that an anarchist revolution

will not degenerate into some new form of domination and exploitation.

However, there are other reasons why economic inequality -- say, in differences of income levels or working conditions, which may arise from competition for "better" workers -- would be far less severe under any form of anarchist society than it is under capitalism. Firstly, the syndicates would be democratically managed. This would result in much smaller wage differentials, because there is no board of wealthy directors setting wage levels for their own gain and who think nothing of hierarchy and having elites. The decentralisation of power in an anarchist society will ensure that there would no longer be wealthy elites paying each other vast amounts of money. This can be seen from the experience of the Mondragon cooperatives, where the wage difference between the highest paid and lowest paid worker was 4 to 1. This was only increased recently when they had to compete with large capitalist companies, and even then the new ratio of 9 to 1 is **far** smaller than those in American or British companies (in America, for example, the ratio is even as high as 200 to 1 and beyond!).

It is a common myth that managers, executives and so on are "rugged individuals" and are paid so highly because of their unique abilities. Actually, they are so highly paid because they are bureaucrats in command of large hierarchical institutions. It is the hierarchical nature of the capitalist firm that ensures inequality, **not** exceptional skills. Even enthusiastic supporters of capitalism provide evidence to support this claim. Peter Drucker (in **Concept of the Corporation**) brushed away the claim that corporate organisation brings managers

with exceptional ability to the top when he noted that "*[n]o institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organised in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership of average human beings.*" [p. 35] For Drucker, "*the things that really count are not the individual members but the relations of command and responsibility among them.*" [p. 34]

Anarchists argue that high wage differences are the result of how capitalism is organised and that capitalist economics exists to justify these results by assuming company hierarchy and capitalist ownership evolved naturally (as opposed to being created by state action and protection). The end of capitalist hierarchy would also see the end of vast differences of income because decision making power would be decentralised back into the hands of those affected by those decisions.

Secondly, corporations would not exist. A network of workplaces coordinated by confederal committees would not have the resources available to pay exorbitant wages. Unlike a capitalist company, power is decentralised in a confederation of syndicates and wealth does not flow to the top. This means that there is no elite of executives who control the surplus made from the company's workers and can use that surplus to pay themselves high wages while ensuring that the major shareholders receive high enough dividends not to question their activities (or their pay).

Thirdly, management positions would be rotated, ensuring that everyone gets experience of the work, thus reducing the artificial scarcity created by the division of labour. Also, education would be extensive, ensuring

that engineers, doctors, and other skilled workers would do the work because they **enjoyed** doing it and not for financial reward. And lastly, we should like to point out that people work for many reasons, not just for high wages. Feelings of solidarity, empathy, friendship with their fellow workers would also help reduce competition between syndicates for workers. Of course, having no means of unearned income (such as rent and interest), social anarchism will reduce income differentials even more.

Of course, the "competition" objection assumes that syndicates and members of syndicates will place financial considerations above all else. This is not the case, and few individuals are the economic robots assumed in capitalist dogma. Since syndicates are **not** competing for market share, it is likely that new techniques would be shared between workplaces and skilled workers might decide to rotate their work between syndicates in order to maximise their working time until such time as the general skill level in society increases.

So, while recognising that competition for skilled workers could exist, anarchists think there are plenty of reasons not to worry about massive economic inequality being created, which in turn would re-create the state. The apologists for capitalism who put forward this argument forget that the pursuit of self-interest is universal, meaning that everyone would be interesting in maximising his or her liberty, and so would be unlikely to allow inequalities to develop which threatened that liberty.

As for competition for scarce resources, it's clear that it would be in the interests of communes and syndicates which have them to share them with others instead of charging high prices for them. This is for two reasons. Firstly, they may find themselves boycotted by others, and so they would be denied the advantages of social cooperation. Secondly, they may be subject to such activities themselves at a future date and so it would be wise for them to remember to *"treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances."* As anarchism will never come about unless people desire it and start to organise their own lives, it's clear that an anarchist society would be inhabited by individuals who followed that ethical principle.

It is doubtful that people inspired by anarchist ideas would start to charge each other high prices, particularly since the syndicates and community assemblies are likely to vote for a wide basis of surplus distribution, precisely to avoid this problem and to ensure that production will be for use rather than profit (see section I.4.9, ["What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution?"](#)). In addition, as other communities and syndicates would likely boycott any syndicate or commune that was acting in non-cooperative ways, it is likely that social pressure would soon result in those willing to exploit others rethinking their position. Cooperation does not imply a willingness to tolerate with those who desire to take advantage of you.

Examples of anarchism in action show that there is frequently a spontaneous tendency towards charging cost prices for goods, as well as attempts to work together to reduce the dangers of isolation and competition. One thing to remember is that anarchy will not be created

"overnight," and so potential problems will be worked out over time. Underlying all these kinds of objections is the assumption that cooperation will **not** be more beneficial to all involved than competition. However, in terms of quality of life, cooperation will soon be seen to be the better system, even by the most highly paid workers. There is far more to life than the size of one's pay packet, and anarchism exists in order to ensure that life is far more than the weekly grind of boring work and the few hours of hectic consumption in which people attempt to fill the "spiritual hole" created by a way of life which places profits above people.

I.3.7 WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DO NOT WANT TO JOIN A SYNDICATE?

In this case, they are free to work alone, by their own labour. Anarchists have no desire to force people to join a syndicate, for as Malatesta argued, *"what has to be destroyed at once. . . is **capitalistic property**, that is, the fact that a few control the natural wealth and the instruments of production and can thus oblige others to work for them . . . [but one must have a] right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist -- as one wishes, always on the condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* [Malatesta: **Life and Ideas**, p. 102]

In other words, different forms of social life will be experimented with, depending on what people desire. Of course some people (particularly right-wing "libertarians") ask how anarchists can reconcile individual freedom with expropriation of capital. All we

can say is that these critics subscribe to the idea that one should not interfere with the "individual freedom" of those in positions of authority to oppress others, and that this premise turns the concept of individual freedom on its head, making oppression a "right!"

However, right-wing "libertarians" do raise a valid question when they ask if anarchism would result in self-employed people being forced into cooperatives as the result of a popular movement. The answer is no, because the destruction of title deeds would not harm the independent worker, whose real title is possession and the work done. What anarchists want to eliminate is not possessions but capitalist "property" -- namely *"the destruction of the titles of the proprietors who exploit the labour of others and, above all, of expropriating them in fact in order to put . . . all the means of production at the disposal of those who do the work."* [Op. Cit., p. 103]

This means that independent producers will still exist within an anarchist society, and some workplaces -- perhaps whole areas -- will not be part of a confederation. This is natural in a free society, for different people have different ideas and ideals. Of course, some people may desire to become capitalists, and they may offer to employ people and pay them wages. However, such a situation would be unlikely. Simply put, why would anyone desire to work for the would-be employer? Malatesta makes this point as follows:

"It remains to be seen whether not being able to obtain assistance or people to exploit -- and he [the would-be capitalist] would find none because nobody, having a right to the means of production and being free to work

on his own or as an equal with others in the large organisations of production would want to be exploited by a small employer -- . . . it remains to be seen whether these isolated workers would not find it more convenient to combine with others and voluntarily join one of the existing communities" [Op. Cit., p. 102-103].

So where would the capitalist wannabe find people to work for him?

However, let us suppose there is a self-employed inventor, Ferguson, who comes up with a new innovation without the help of the cooperative sector. Would anarchists steal his idea? Not at all. The cooperatives, which by hypothesis have been organized by people who believe in giving producers the full value of their product, would pay Ferguson an equitable amount for his idea, which would then become common across society. However, if he refused to sell his invention and instead tried to claim a patent monopoly on it in order to gather a group of wage slaves to exploit, no one would agree to work for him unless they got the full control over both the product of their labour and the labour process itself.

In addition, we would imagine they would also refuse to work for someone unless they also got the capital they used at the end of their contract (i.e. a system of "hire-purchase" on the means of production used). In other words, by removing the statist supports of capitalism, would-be capitalists would find it hard to "compete" with the cooperative sector and would not be in a position to exploit others' labour.

With a system of communal production (in social anarchism) and mutual banks (in individualist anarchism), "usury" -- i.e. charging a use-fee for a monopolized item, of which patents are an instance -- would no longer be possible and the inventor would be like any other worker, exchanging the product of his or her labour. As Ben Tucker argued, *"the patent monopoly. . . consists in protecting inventors and authors against competition for a period of time long enough for them to extort from the people a reward enormously in excess of the labour measure of their services -- in other words, in giving certain people a right of property for a term of years in laws and facts of nature, and the power to extract tribute from others for the use of this natural wealth, which should be open to all. The abolition of this monopoly would fill its beneficiaries with a wholesome fear of competition which should cause them to be satisfied with pay for their services equal to that which other labourers get for theirs, and secure it by placing their products and works on the market at the outset at prices so low that their lines of business would be no more tempting to competitors than any other lines"* [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150-1].

In other words, with the end of capitalism and statism, a free society has no fear of capitalist firms being created or growing again, because it rejects the idea that everyone must be in a syndicate. Without statism to back up various class-based monopolies of capitalist privilege, capitalism could not become dominant. In addition, the advantages of cooperation between syndicates would exceed whatever temporary advantages existed for syndicates to practice commodity exchange in a mutualist market.

I.4 HOW COULD AN ANARCHIST ECONOMY FUNCTION?

This is an important question facing all opponents of a given system - what will you replace it with? We can say, of course, that it is pointless making blue-prints of how a future anarchist society will work as the future will be created by everyone, not just the few anarchists and libertarian socialists who write books and FAQs. This is very true, we cannot predict what a free society will actually be like or develop and we have no intention to do so here. However, this reply (whatever its other merits) ignores a key point, people need to have some idea of what anarchism aims for before they decide to spend their lives trying to create it.

So, how would an anarchist system function? That depends on the economic ideas people have. A mutualist economy will function differently than a communist one, for example, but they will have similar features. As Rudolf Rocker put it, "*[c]ommon to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of a free humanity. In this sense, Mutualism, Collectivism, and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in the society of the future different forms of economic cooperation existing side-by-side, since any social progress must be associated with that free experimentation and practical testing-out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p.16]

So, given the common aims of anarchists, it is unsurprising that the economic systems they suggest will have common features. For all anarchists, a *"voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities... is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful."* [Oscar Wilde, **The Soul of Man Under Socialism**, page 25] Or, to bring this ideal up to day, as Chomsky put it, *"[t]he task for a modern industrial society is to achieve what is now technically realizable, namely, a society which is really based on free voluntary participation of people who produce and create, live their lives freely within institutions they control, and with limited hierarchical structures, possibly none at all."*

In other words, anarchists desire to organise voluntary workers associations which will try to ensure a minimisation of mindless labour in order to maximise the time available for creative activity both inside and outside "work." This is to be achieved by free cooperation between equals, for while competition may be the "law" of the jungle, cooperation is the law of civilisation.

This cooperation is **not** based on "altruism," but self-interest. As Proudhon argued, *"Mutuality, reciprocity exists when all the workers in an industry instead of working for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products, work for one another and thus collaborate in the making of a common product whose profits they share amongst themselves. Extend the principle of reciprocity as uniting the work of every group, to the Workers' Societies as units, and you have created a form of civilisation which from all points of*

view - political, economic and aesthetic - is radically different from all earlier civilisations." [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, page 29-30] In other words, solidarity and cooperation allows us time to enjoy life and to gain the benefits of our labour ourselves - Mutual Aid results in a better life than mutual struggle and so *"the **association for struggle** will be a much more effective support for civilisation, progress, and evolution than is the **struggle for existence** with its savage daily competitions."* [Luigi Geallani, **The End of Anarchism**, p. 26]

Combined with this desire for free cooperation, is a desire to end centralised systems. The opposition to centralisation is often framed in a distinctly false manner. This can be seen when Alex Nove, a leading market socialist, argues that *"there are horizontal links (market), there are vertical links (hierarchy). What other dimension is there?"* [Alex Nove, **The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, p. 226] In other words, Nove states that to oppose central planning means to embrace the market. This, however, is not true. Horizontal links need not be market based any more than vertical links need be hierarchical. But the core point in his argument is very true, an anarchist society must be based essentially on horizontal links between individuals and associations, freely cooperating together as they (not a central body) sees fit. This cooperation will be source of any "vertical" links in an anarchist economy. When a group of individuals or associations meet together and discuss common interests and make common decisions they will be bound by their own decisions. This is radically different from a central body giving out orders because those affected will determine the content of these decisions. In other words, instead of decisions being

handed down from the top, they will be created from the bottom up.

So, while refusing to define exactly how an anarchist system will work, we will explore the implications of how the anarchist principles and ideals outlined above could be put into practice. Bare in mind that this is just a possible framework for a system which has few historical examples to draw upon as evidence. This means that we can only indicate the general outlines of what an anarchist society could be like. Those seeking "recipes" and exactness should look elsewhere. In all likelihood, the framework we present will be modified and changed (even ignored) in light of the real experiences and problems people will face when creating a new society. Lastly we should point out that there may be a tendency for some to compare this framework with the **theory** of capitalism (i.e. perfectly functioning "free" markets or quasi-perfect ones) as opposed to its reality. A perfectly working capitalist system only exists in text books and in the heads of ideologues who take the theory as reality. No system is perfect, particularly capitalism, and to compare "perfect" capitalism with any system is a pointless task.

I.4.1 WHAT IS THE POINT OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN ANARCHY?

The basic point of economic activity is an anarchist society is to ensure that we produce what we desire to consume and that our consumption is under our own control and not vice versa. The second point may seem strange, how can consumption control us for we

consume what we desire and no one forces us to do so. However, this is not quite true under a capitalist economy. Capitalism, in order to survive, **must** expand, **must** create more and more profits. This leads to irrational side effects, for example, the advertising industry. While it does without saying that producers need to let consumers know what is available for consumption, capitalism ensures advertising goes beyond this by creating needs that did not exist.

Therefore, the point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to produce as and when required and not, as under capitalism, to organise production for the sake of production. For anarchists, *"Real wealth consists of things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in."* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 53]

This means that, in an anarchist society, economic activity is the process by which we produce what is both useful **and** beautiful in a way that empowers the individual. As Oscar Wilde put it, individuals will produce what is beautiful, based upon the *"study of the needs of mankind, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy"* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 175] This means that anarchist economic ideas are the same as what Political Economy should be, not what it actually is, namely the *"essential basis of all Political Economy, [is] the study of the most favourable conditions for giving society the greatest amount of useful products with the least waste of human energy"* and, we may add today, the least disruption of nature then capitalism is condemned. [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 144] The anarchists charge capitalism with wasting human energy

due to its irrational nature and workings, energy that could be spent creating what is beautiful.

Under capitalism, instead of humans controlling production, production controls them. Anarchists want to change this and desire to create an economic network which will allow the maximisation of an individual's free time in order for them to express and develop their individuality (or to *"create what is beautiful"*). So instead of aiming just to produce because the economy will collapse if we did not, anarchists want to ensure that we produce what is useful in a manner which liberates the individual and empowers them in all aspects of their lives. They share this desire with the classical Liberals and agree totally with Humbolt's statement that *"the end of man . . . is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole."* [cited by J.S. Mill in **On Liberty**, chapter III]

This desire means that anarchists reject the capitalist definition of "efficiency." Anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they argue that *"since people are conscious agents whose characteristics and therefore preferences develop over time, to access long-term efficiency we must assess the impact of economic institutions on people's development."* [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p.9] Capitalism, as we have explained before, is highly inefficient in this light due to the effects of hierarchy and the resulting marginalisation and disempowerment of the majority of society. As Albert and Hahnel go on to note, *"self-management, solidarity, and variety are all legitimate evaluative criteria for judging economic institutions . . . Asking whether particular institutions help people attain*

self-management, variety, and solidarity is sensible."
[Op. Cit., p.9]

In other words, anarchists think that any economic activity in a free society is to do useful things in such a way that gives those doing it as much pleasure as possible. The point of such activity is to express the individuality of those doing it, and for that to happen they must control the work process itself. Only by self-management can work become a means of empowering the individual and developing his or her powers.

In a nutshell, useful work will replace useless toil in an anarchist society.

I.4.2 WHY DO ANARCHISTS DESIRE TO ABOLISH WORK?

Anarchists desire to see humanity liberate itself from "work." This may come as a shock for many people and will do much to "prove" that anarchism is essentially utopian. However, we think that such an abolition is not only necessary, it is possible. This is because "work" is one of the major dangers to freedom we face.

If by freedom we mean self-government, then it's clear that being subjected to hierarchy in the workplace subverts our abilities to think and judge for ourselves. Like any skill, critical analysis and independent thought have to be practiced continually in order to remain at their full potential. However, as well as hierarchy, the workplace environment created by these power structures also helps to undermine these abilities. This was recognised by Adam Smith:

"The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments." That being so, "the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or nearly the same, has no occasion to extend his understanding... and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be... But in every improved and civilised society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes pains to prevent it." [Adam Smith, quoted by Noam Chomsky, Year 501, p. 18]

Smith's argument (usually ignored by those who claim to follow his ideas) is backed up by extensive evidence. The different types of authority structures and different technologies have different effects on those who work within them. Carole Pateman (in **Participation and Democratic Theory**) notes that the evidence suggests that *"[o]nly certain work situations were found to be conducive to the development of the psychological characteristics [suitable for freedom, such as] . . . the feelings of personal confidence and efficacy that underlay the sense of political efficacy."* [p. 51] Within capitalist companies based upon highly rationalised work environment, extensive division of labour and *"no control over the pace or technique of his [or her] work, no room to exercise skill or leadership"* [Op. Cit., p.51] workers, according to a psychological study, is *"resigned to his lot . . . more dependent than independent . . . he lacks confidence in himself . . . he is humble . . . the most prevalent feeling states . . . seem to be fear and anxiety."* [p. 52]

However, in workplaces where *"the worker has a high degree of personal control over his work . . . and a very large degree of freedom from external control . . .[or has] collective responsibility of a crew of employees . . .[who] had control over the pace and method of getting the work done, and the work crews were largely internally self-disciplining"* [p. 52] a different social character is seen. This was characterised by *"a strong sense of individualism and autonomy, and a solid acceptance of citizenship in the large society . . .[and] a highly developed feeling of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and is therefore ready to participate in the social and political institutions of the community."* [p. 52]

She notes that R. Blauner (in **Alienation and Freedom**) states that the *"nature of a man's work affects his social character and personality"* and that an *"industrial environment tends to breed a distinct social type."* [cited by Pateman, p. 52] As Bob Black argues:

"You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you'll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinization all around us than even such significant moronizing mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families they start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics,

culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it." [**The Abolition of Work**]

For this reason anarchists desire, to use Bob Black's phrase, "*the abolition of work.*" "Work," in this context, does not mean any form of productive activity. Far from it. "Work" (in the sense of doing necessary things) will always be with us. There is no getting away from it, crops need to be grow, schools built, houses fixed, and so on. No, "work" in this context means any form of labour in which the worker does not control his or her own activity. In other words **wage labour** in all its many forms.

A society based upon wage labour (i.e. a capitalist society) will result in a society within which the typical worker uses few of their abilities, exercise little or no control over their work because they are governed by a boss during working hours. This has been proved to lower the individual's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, as would be expected in any social relationship that denied self-government to workers. Capitalism is marked by an extreme division of labour, particularly between mental labour and physical labour. It reduces the worker to a mere machine operator, following the orders of his or her boss. Therefore, a libertarian that does not support economic liberty (i.e. self-management) is no libertarian at all.

Capitalism bases its rationale for itself on consumption. However, this results in a viewpoint which minimises the importance of the time we spend in productive activity. Anarchists consider that it is essential for individual's to

use and develop their unique attributes and capacities in all walks of life, to maximise their powers. Therefore the idea that "work" should be ignored in favour of consumption is totally mad. Productive activity is an important way of developing our inner-powers and express ourselves, in other words be creative. Capitalism's emphasis on consumption sg]hows the poverty of that system. As Alexander Berkman argues:

"We do not live by bread alone. True, existence is not possible without opportunity to satisfy our physical needs. But the gratification of these by no means constitutes all of life. Our present system of disinheriting millions, made the belly the centre of the universe, so to speak. But in a sensible society . . . [t]he feelings of human sympathy, of justice and right would have a chance to develop, to be satisfied, to broaden and grow."
[ABC of Anarchism, p. 15]

Therefore, capitalism is based on a constant process of alienated consumption, as workers try to find the happiness associated within productive, creative, self-managed activity in a place it does not exist - on the shop shelves. This can partly explain the rise of both mindless consumerism and of religions, as individuals try to find meaning for their lives and happiness, a meaning and happiness frustrated in wage labour and hierarchy.

Capitalism's impoverishment of the individual's spirit is hardly surprising. As William Godwin argued, *"[t]he spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement."* [The Anarchist Reader, p. 131] In other words, any system

based in wage labour or hierarchical relationships in the workplace will result in a deadening of the individual and the creation of a "servile" character. This crushing of individuality springs **directly** from what Godwin called *"the third degree of property"* namely *"a system. . . by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry"* in other words, capitalism. [Op. Cit., p. 129]

Anarchists desire to change this and create a society based upon freedom in all aspects of life. Hence anarchists desire to abolish work, simply because it restricts the liberty and distorts the individuality of those who have to do it. To quote Emma Goldman:

"Anarchism aims to strip labor of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of color, of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of a man should find in work both recreation and hope."

Anarchists do not think that by getting rid of work we will not have to produce necessary goods and so on. Far from it, an anarchist society *"doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a ludic revolution . . . a collective adventure in generalized joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive."* [Bob Black, Op. Cit.]

This means that in an anarchist society every effort would be made to reduce boring, unpleasant activity to a minimum and ensure that whatever productive activity is required to be done is as pleasant as possible and based upon voluntary labour. However, it is important to

remember Cornelius Castoriadis point that a *"Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be the fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to . . . transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more 'free' time to individuals - which might well be empty time - so that they may fill it at will with 'poetry' or the craving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to find expression in creative activity."* [**Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 14] Essentially, *"the problem is to put poetry into work."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 15]

This is why anarchists desire to abolish "work" (i.e. wage labour), to ensure that whatever work (i.e. economic activity) is required to be done is under the direct control of those who do it. In this way it can be liberated and so become a means of self-realization and not a form of self-negation. In other words, anarchists want to abolish work because *"Life, the art of living, has become a dull formula, flat and inert."* [A. Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27] Anarchists want to bring the spontaneity and joy of life back into productive activity and save humanity from the dead hand of capital.

All this does not imply that anarchists do think that individuals will not seek to "specialise" in one form of productive activity rather than another. Far from it, people in a free society will pick activities which interest them as the main focal point of their means of self-expression. This "division of work" is common in humanity and can be seen under capitalism - most children and teenagers pick a specific line of work because they are interested, or at least desire to do a

specific kind of work. This natural desire to do what interests you and what you are good at will be encouraged in an anarchist society. The difference is that individuals will manage all aspects of the "work" required (for example, engineers will also take part in self-managing their workplaces) and the strict division of labour of capitalism will be abolished (see section [I.4.3](#)). In other words, anarchists want to replace the division of labour by the division of work.

I.4.3 HOW DO ANARCHISTS INTEND TO ABOLISH WORK?

Basically by workers' self-management of production and community control of the means of production. It is hardly in the interests of those who do the actual "work" to have bad working conditions, boring, repetitive labour, and so on. Therefore, a key aspect of the liberation from work is to create a self-managed society, *"a society in which everyone has equal means to develop and that all are or can be at the time intellectual and manual workers, and the only differences remaining between men [and women] are those which stem from the natural diversity of aptitudes, and that all jobs, all functions, give an equal right to the enjoyment of social possibilities."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 40]

Essential to this task is decentralisation and the use of appropriate technology. Decentralisation is important to ensure that those who do work can determine how to liberate it. A decentralised system will ensure that ordinary people can identify areas for technological innovation, and so understand the need to get rid of certain kinds of work. Unless ordinary people understand

and control the introduction of technology, then they will never be fully aware of the benefits of technology and resist advances which may be in their best interests to introduce. This is the full meaning of appropriate technology, namely the use of technology which those most affected feel to be best in a given situation. Such technology may or may not be technologically "advanced" but it will be of the kind which ordinary people can understand and, most importantly, control.

The potential for rational use of technology can be seen from capitalism. Under capitalism technology is used to increase profits, to expand the economy, not to liberate **all** individuals from useless toil (it does, of course, liberate a few from such "activity"). As Ted Trainer argues:

"Two figures drive the point home. In the long term, productivity (i.e. output per hour of work) increases at about 2 percent per annum, meaning that each 35 years we could cut the work week by half while producing as much as we were at the beginning. A number of OECD. . . countries could actually have cut from a five-day work week to around a one-day work week in the last 25 years while maintaining their output at the same level. In this economy we must therefore double the annual amount we consume per person every 35 years just to prevent unemployment from rising and to avoid reduction in outlets available to OASK up investable capital.

"Second, according to the US Bureau for Mines, the amount of capital per person available for investment in the United States will increase at 3.6 percent per annum (i.e. will double in 20-year intervals). This indicates that unless Americans double the volume of goods and

services they consume every 20 years, their economy will be in serious difficulties"

*"Hence the ceaseless and increasing pressure to find more business opportunities" ["What is Development", p 57-90, **Society and Nature**, Issue No. 7, p.49]*

And, remember, these figures include production in many areas of the economy that would not exist in a free society - state and capitalist bureaucracy, weapons production, and so on. In addition, it does not take into account the labour of those who do not actually produce anything useful and so the level of production for useful goods would be higher than Trainer indicates. In addition, goods will be built to last and so much production will become sensible and not governed by an insane desire to maximise profits at the expense of everything else.

The decentralisation of power will ensure that self-management becomes universal. This will see the end of division of labour as mental and physical work becomes unified and those who do the work also manage it. This will allow *"the free exercise of **all** the faculties of man"* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 148] both inside and outside "work."

Work will become, primarily, the expression of a person's pleasure in what they are doing and become like an art - an expression of their creativity and individuality. Work as an art will become expressed in the workplace as well as the work process, with workplaces transformed and integrated into the local community and environment (see section [1.4.14](#) - What will the workplace of tomorrow be like?). This will

obviously apply to work conducted in the home as well, otherwise the *"half of humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**]

In other words, anarchists desire *"to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work -- the production of use-values -- with the best of play. . . its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification"* - the transformation of what economists call production into productive play. [Bob Black, **Smokestack Lightning**]

In addition, a decentralised system will build up a sense of community and trust between individuals and ensure the creation of an ethical economy, one based on interactions between individuals and not commodities caught in the flux of market forces. This ideal of a *"moral economy"* can be seen in both social anarchists desire for the end of the market system and the individualists insistence that *"cost be the limit of price."* Anarchists recognise that the *"traditional local market. . . is essentially different from the market as it developed in modern capitalism. Bartering on a local market offered an opportunity to meet for the purpose of exchanging commodities. Producers and customers became acquainted; they were relatively small groups. . . The modern market is no longer a meeting place but a mechanism characterized by abstract and impersonal demand. One produces for this market, not for a known circle of customers; its verdict is based on laws of supply and demand."* [**Man for Himself**, pp. 67-68]

Anarchists reject the capitalist notion that economic activity should be based on maximising profit as the be

all and end all of such work (buying and selling on the "impersonal market"). As markets only work through people, individuals, who buy and sell (but, in the end, control them - in "free markets" only the market is free) this means that for the market to be "impersonal" as it is in capitalism it implies that those involved have to be unconcerned about personalities, including their own. Profit, not ethics, is what counts. The "impersonal" market suggests individuals who act in an impersonal, and so unethical, manner. The morality of what they produce is irrelevant, as long as profits are produced.

Instead, anarchists consider economic activity as an expression of the human spirit, an expression of the innate human need to express ourselves and to create. Capitalism distorts these needs and makes economic activity a deadening experience by the division of labour and hierarchy. Anarchists think remember that *"industry is not an end in itself, but should only be a means to ensure to man his material subsistence and to make accessible to him the blessings of a higher intellectual culture. Where industry is everything and man is nothing begins the realm of a ruthless economic despotism whose workings are no less disastrous than those of any political despotism. The two mutually augment one another, and they are fed from the same source."* [Rudolph Rocker, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**].

Anarchists think that a decentralised social system will allow "work" to be abolished and economic activity humanised and made a means to an end (namely producing useful things and liberated individuals). This would be achieved by, as Rudolf Rocker puts it, the *"alliance of free groups of men and women based on co-*

operative labor and a planned administration of things in the interest of the community." [Ibib.]

However, as things are produced by people, it could be suggested that a "*planned administration of things*" implies a "*planned administration of people*" (although few who suggest this danger apply it to capitalist firms which are like mini-centrally planned states). This objection false simply because anarchism aims "*to reconstruct the economic life of the peoples from the ground up and build it up in the spirit of Socialism.*" [Ibib.]

In other words, those who produce also administer and so govern themselves in free association (and it should be pointed out that any group of individuals in association will make "plans" and "plan," the important question is who does the planning and who does the work. Only in anarchy are both functions united into the same people). Rocker emphasizes this point when he writes that

"Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements." [Op. Cit. p. 94]

In other words, the "*planned administration of things*" would be done by the producers **themselves**, in independent groupings. This would likely take the form (as we indicated in section [1.3](#)) of confederations of syndicates who communicate information between themselves and respond to changes in the production and distribution of products by increasing or decreasing the required means of production in a cooperative (i.e. "planned") fashion. No "central planning" or "central planners" governing the economy, just workers cooperating together as equals.

Therefore, an anarchist society would abolish work by ensuring that those who do the work actually control it. They would do so in a network of self-managed associations, a society "*composed of a number of societies banded together for everything that demands a common effort: federations of producers for all kinds of production, of societies for consumption . . . All these groups will unite their efforts through mutual agreement . . . Personal initiative will be encouraged and every tendency to uniformity and centralisation combated*" [Peter Kropotkin, quoted by Buber in **Paths in Utopia**]

In response to consumption patterns, syndicates will have to expand or reduce production and will have to attract volunteers to do the necessary work. The very basis of free association will ensure the abolition of work, as individuals will apply for "work" they enjoy doing and so would be interested in reducing "work" they did not want to do to a minimum. Such a decentralisation of power would unleash a wealth of innovation and ensure that unpleasant work be minimised and fairly shared (see section [1.4.13](#)).

Now, any form of association requires agreement. Therefore, even a society based on the communist-anarchist maxim "*from each according to their ability, to each according to their need*" will need to make agreements in order to ensure cooperative ventures succeed. In other words, members of a cooperative commonwealth would have to make and keep to their agreements between themselves. This means that syndicates would agree joint starting and finishing times, require notice if individuals want to change "jobs" and so on within and between syndicates. Any joint effort requires some degree of cooperation and agreement. Therefore, between syndicates, an agreement would be reached (in all likelihood) that determined the minimum working hours required by all members of society able to work. How that minimum was actually organised would vary between workplace and commune, with worktimes, flexi-time, job rotation and so on determined by each syndicate (for example, one syndicate may work 8 hours a day, another 4, one may use flexi-time, another more rigid starting and stopping times).

As Kropotkin argued, an anarchist-communist society would be based upon the following kind of "contract" between its members:

"We undertake to give you the use of our houses, stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognised as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing group which you wish to join, or organize a new group, provided that it will undertake to produce necessities. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with whomsoever you like, for

recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste . . . Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year . . . is all we ask of you." [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 153-4]

With such work "necessary to existence" being recognised by individuals and expressed by demand for labour from productive syndicates. It is, of course, up to the individual to decide which work he or she desires to perform from the positions available in the various associations in existence. A union card would be the means by which work hours would be recorded and access to the common wealth of society ensured. And, of course, individuals and groups are free to work alone and exchange the produce of their labour with others, including the confederated syndicates, if they so desired. An anarchist society will be as flexible as possible.

Therefore, we can imagine a social anarchist society being based on two basic arrangements -- firstly, an agreed minimum working week of, say, 20 hours, in a syndicate of your choice, plus any amount of hours doing "work" which you feel like doing - for example, art, experimentation, DIY, composing, gardening and so on. The aim of technological progress would be to reduce the basic working week more and more until the very concept of necessary "work" and free time enjoyments is abolished. In addition, in work considered dangerous or unwanted, then volunteers could trade doing a few hours of such activity for more free time (see section [I.4.13](#) for more on this).

It can be said that this sort of agreement is a restriction of liberty because it is "man-made" (as opposed to the "natural law" of "supply and demand"). This is a

common defense of the free market by individualist anarchists against anarcho-communism, for example. However, while in theory individualist-anarchists can claim that in their vision of society, they don't care when, where, or how a person earns a living, as long as they are not invasive about it the fact is that any economy is based on interactions between individuals. The law of "supply and demand" easily, and often, makes a mockery of the ideas that individuals can work as long as they like - usually they end up working as long as required by market forces (ie the actions of other individuals, but turned into a force outwith their control, see section [I.1.3](#)). This means that individuals do not work as long as they like, but as long as they have to in order to survive. Knowing that "market forces" is the cause of long hours of work hardly makes them any nicer.

And it seems strange to the communist-anarchist that certain free agreements made between equals can be considered authoritarian while others are not. The individualist-anarchist argument that social cooperation to reduce labour is "authoritarian" while agreements between individuals on the market are not seems illogical to social anarchists. They cannot see how its better for individuals to be pressured into working longer than they desire by "invisible hands" than to come to an arrangement with others to manage their own affairs to maximise their free time.

Therefore, free agreement between free and equal individuals is considered the key to abolishing work, based upon decentralisation of power and the use of appropriate technology.

I.4.4 WHAT ECONOMIC DECISION MAKING CRITERIA COULD BE USED IN ANARCHY?

Firstly, it should be noted that anarchists do not have any set idea about the answer to this question. Most anarchists are communists, desiring to see the end of the wages system but that does not mean they want to impose communism onto people. Far from it, communism can only be truly libertarian if it is organised from the bottom up. So, anarchists would agree with Kropotkin that it is a case of not "*determining in advance what form of distribution the producers should accept in their different groups - whether the communist solution, or labor checks, or equal salaries, or any other method*" [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 166] while considering a given solution best in their opinion. Free experiment is a key aspect of anarchism.

However, we will outline some possible means of economic decision making criteria as this question is an important one (it is the crux of the "libertarian socialism is impossible" argument for example). Therefore, we will indicate what possible solutions exist in different forms of anarchism.

In a mutualist or collectivist system, the answer is easy. Prices will exist and be used as a means of making decisions. Mutualism will be more market orientated than collectivism, with collectivism being based on confederations of collectives to respond to changes in demand (i.e. to determine investment decisions and ensure that supply is kept in line with demand). Mutualism, with its system of market based distribution around a network of cooperatives and mutual banks,

does not really need a further discussion as its basic operations are the same as in any non-capitalist market system. Collectivism and communism will have to be discussed in more detail. However, all systems are based on workers' self-management and so the individuals directly affected make the decisions concerning what to produce, when to do it, and how to do it. In this way workers retain control of the product of their labour. It is the social context of these decisions and what criteria workers use to make their decisions that differ between anarchist schools of thought.

Although collectivism promotes the greatest autonomy for worker associations, it should not be confused with a market economy as advocated by supporters of mutualism (particularly in its Individualist form). The goods produced by the collectivized factories and workshops are exchanged not according to highest price that can be wrung from consumers, but according to their actual production costs. The determination of these honest prices is to be by a "Bank of Exchange" in each community (obviously an idea borrowed from Proudhon). These "Banks" would represent the various producer confederations and consumer/citizen groups in the community and would seek to negotiate these "honest" prices (which would, in all likelihood, include "hidden" costs like pollution). These agreements would be subject to ratification by the assemblies of the those involved.

As Guillaume puts it *"...the value of the commodities having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional cooperative federations [i.e. confederations of syndicates] and the various communes, who will also furnish statistics to the Banks*

of Exchange. The Bank of Exchange will remit to the producers negotiable vouchers representing the value of their products; these vouchers will be accepted throughout the territory included in the federation of communes." [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 366] These vouchers would related to hours worked, for example, and when used as a guide for investment decisions could be supplemented with cost-benefit analysis of the kind possibly used in a communist-anarchist society (see below).

Although this scheme bears a strong resemblance to Proudhonian "People's Banks," it should be noted that the Banks of Exchange, along with a "Communal Statistical Commission," are intended to have a "planning" function as well to ensure that supply meets demand. This does not imply a "command" economy, but simple book keeping for *"each Bank of Exchange makes sure in advance that these products are in demand [in order to risk] nothing by immediately issuing payment vouchers to the producers."* [Op. Cit., p. 367] The workers syndicates would still determine what orders to produce and each commune would be free to choose its suppliers.

As will be discussed in more depth later (see section [I.4.7](#)) information about consumption patterns will be recorded and used by workers to inform their production and investment decisions. In addition, we can imagine that production syndicates would encourage communes as well as consumer groups and cooperatives to participate in making these decisions. This would ensure that produced goods reflect consumer needs. Moreover, as conditions permit, the exchange functions of the communal "banks" would (in all likelihood) be gradually

replaced by the distribution of goods "in accordance with the needs of the consumers." In other words, most supporters of collectivist anarchism see it has a temporary measure before anarcho-communism could develop.

Communist anarchism would be similar to collectivism, i.e. a system of confederations of collectives, communes and distribution centers ("Communal stores"). However, in an anarcho-communist system, prices are not used. How will economic decision making be done? One possible solution is as follows:

"As to decisions involving choices of a general nature, such as what forms of energy to use, which of two or more materials to employ to produce a particular good, whether to build a new factory, there is a ... technique... that could be [used]... 'cost-benefit analysis'... in socialism a points scheme for attributing relative importance to the various relevant considerations could be used... The points attributed to these considerations would be subjective, in the sense that this would depend on a deliberate social decision rather than some objective standard, but this is the case even under capitalism when a monetary value has to be attributed to some such 'cost' or 'benefit'... In the sense that one of the aims of socialism is precisely to rescue humankind from the capitalist fixation with production time/money, cost-benefit analyses, as a means of taking into account other factors, could therefore be said to be more appropriate for use in socialism than under capitalism. Using points systems to attribute relative importance in this way would not be to recreate some universal unit of evaluation and calculation, but simple to employ a technique to facilitate decision-making in particular

concrete cases." [Adam Buick and John Crump, **State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management**, pp. 138-139]

This points system would be the means by which producers and consumers would be able to determine whether the use of a particular good is efficient or not. Unlike prices, this cost-benefit analysis system would ensure that production and consumption reflects social and ecological costs, awareness and priorities. Of course, as well as absolute scarcity, prices also reflect relative scarcity (while in the long term, market prices tend towards their production price, in the short term prices can change as a result of changes in supply and demand under capitalism). How a communist society could take into account such short term changes and communicate them through out the economy is discussed in section [I.4.5](#) (What about "supply and demand"?). Needless to say, production and investment decisions based upon such cost-benefit analysis would take into account the current production situation and so the relative scarcity of specific goods.

Therefore, a communist-anarchist society would be based around a network of syndicates who communicate information between each other. Instead of the "price" being communicated between workplaces as in capitalism, actual physical data will be sent. This data is a summary of the use values of the good (for example labour time and energy used to produce it, pollution details, relative scarcity and so forth). With this information a cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to determine which good will be best to use in a given situation based upon mutually agreed common values. The data for a given workplace could be compared to the

industry as a whole (as confederations of syndicates would gather and produce such information - see section [1.3.5](#)) in order to determine whether a specific workplace will efficiently produce the required goods (this system has the additional advantage of indicating which workplaces require investment to bring them in line, or improve upon, the industrial average in terms of working conditions, hours worked and so on). In addition, common rules of thumb would possibly be agreed, such as agreements not to use scarce materials unless there is no alternative (either ones that use a lot of labour, energy and time to produce or those whose demand is currently exceeding supply capacity).

Similarly, when ordering goods, the syndicate, commune or individual involved will have to inform the syndicate why it is required in order to allow the syndicate to determine if they desire to produce the good and to enable them to prioritise the orders they receive. In this way, resource use can be guided by social considerations and "unreasonable" requests ignored (for example, if an individual "needs" a ship-builders syndicate to build a ship for his personal use, the ship-builders may not "need" to build it and instead builds ships for the transportation of freight). However, in almost all cases of individual consumption, no such information will be needed as communal stores would order consumer goods in bulk as they do now. Hence the economy would be a vast network of cooperating individuals and workplaces and the dispersed knowledge which exists within any society can be put to good effect (**better** effect than under capitalism because it does not hide social and ecological costs in the way market prices do and cooperation will eliminate the business cycle and its resulting social problems).

Therefore, production units in a social anarchist society, by virtue of their autonomy within association, are aware of what is socially useful for them to produce and, by virtue of their links with communes, also aware of the social (human and ecological) cost of the resources they need to produce it. They can combine this knowledge, reflecting overall social priorities, with their local knowledge of the detailed circumstances of their workplaces and communities to decide how they can best use their productive capacity. In this way the division of knowledge within society can be used by the syndicates effectively as well as overcoming the restrictions within knowledge communication imposed by the price mechanism.

Moreover, production units, by their association within confederations (or Guilds) ensure that there is effective communication between them. This results in a process of negotiated coordination between equals (i.e horizontal links and agreements) for major investment decisions, thus bringing together supply and demand and allowing the plans of the various units to be coordinated. By this process of co-operation, production units can reduce duplicating effort and so reduce the waste associated with over-investment (and so the irrationalities of booms and slumps associated with the price mechanism, which does not provide sufficient information to allow workplaces to efficiently coordinate their plans - see section [C.7.1](#)).

One final point on this subject. As social anarchists consider it important to encourage all to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, it would be the role of communal confederations to determine the relative points value of given inputs and outputs. In this way, **all**

individuals in a community determine how their society develops, so ensuring that economic activity is responsible to social needs and takes into account the desires of everyone affected by production. In this way the problems associated with the "Isolation Paradox" (see section [B.6](#)) can be overcome and so consumption and production can be harmonised with the needs of individuals as members of society and the environment they live in.

I.4.5 WHAT ABOUT "SUPPLY AND DEMAND"?

Anarchists do not ignore the facts of life, namely that at a given moment there is so much of a certain good produced and so much of it is desired to be consumed or used. Neither do we deny that different individuals have different interests and tastes. However, this is not what is usually meant by "supply and demand." In often in general economic debate, this formula is given a certain mythical quality which ignores the underlying realities which it reflects as well as some unwholesome implications of the theory. So, before discussing "supply and demand" in an anarchist society, it is worthwhile to make a few points about the "law of supply and demand" in general.

Firstly, as E.P. Thompson argues, "supply and demand" promotes *"the notion that high prices were a (painful) remedy for dearth, in drawing supplies to the afflicted region of scarcity. But what draws supply are not high prices but sufficient money in their purses to pay high prices. A characteristic phenomenon in times of dearth is that it generates unemployment and empty purses; in*

purchasing necessities at inflated prices people cease to be able to buy inessentials [causing unemployment] . . . Hence the number of those able to pay the inflated prices declines in the afflicted regions, and food may be exported to neighbouring, less afflicted, regions where employment is holding up and consumers still have money with which to pay. In thus sequence, high prices can actually withdraw supply from the most afflicted area." [**Customs in Common**, pp. 283-4]

Therefore "the law of supply and demand" may not be the "most efficient" means of distribution in a society based on inequality. This is clearly reflected in the "rationing" by purse which this system is based on. While in the economics books, price is the means by which scarce resources are "rationed" in reality this creates many errors. Adam Smith argued that high prices discourage consumption, putting *"everybody more or less, but particularly the inferior ranks of people, upon thrift and good management."* [cited by Thompson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 284] However, as Thompson notes, *"[h]owever persuasive the metaphor, there is an elision of the real relationships assigned by price, which suggests. . . ideological sleight-of-mind. Rationing by price does not allocate resources equally among those in need; it reserves the supply to those who can pay the price and excludes those who can't. . . The raising of prices during dearth could 'ration' them [the poor] out of the market altogether."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 285]

In other words, the market cannot be isolated and abstracted from the network of political, social and legal relations within which it is situated. This means that all that "supply and demand" tells us is that those with money can demand more, and be supplied with more,

that those without. Whether this is the "most efficient" result for society cannot be determined (unless, of course, you assume that rich people are more valuable than working class ones **because** they are rich). This has an obvious effect on production, with "effective demand" twisting economic activity. As Chomsky notes, *"[t]hose who have more money tend to consume more, for obvious reasons. So consumption is skewed towards luxuries for the rich, rather than necessities for the poor."* George Barret brings home of the evil of such a "skewed" form of production:

"To-day the scramble is to compete for the greatest profits. If there is more profit to be made in satisfying my lady's passing whim than there is in feeding hungry children, then competition brings us in feverish haste to supply the former, whilst cold charity or the poor law can supply the latter, or leave it unsupplied, just as it feels disposed. That is how it works out." [**Objections to Anarchism**]

Therefore, as far as "supply and demand" is concerned, anarchists are well aware of the need to create and distribute necessary goods to those who require them. This, however, cannot be achieved under capitalism. In effect, supply and demand under capitalism results in those with most money determining what is an "efficient" allocation of resources for if financial profit is the sole consideration for resource allocation, then the wealthy can outbid the poor and ensure the highest returns. The less wealthy can do without.

However, the question remains of how, in an anarchist society, do you know that valuable labour and materials might be better employed elsewhere? How do workers

judge which tools are most appropriate? How do they decide among different materials if they all meet the technical specifications? How important are some goods than others? How important is cellophane compared to vacuum-cleaner bags?

It is answers like this that the supporters of the market claim that their system answers. However, as indicated it does answer them in irrational and dehumanising ways under capitalism but the question is can anarchism answer them? Yes, although the manner this is done varies between anarchist threads. In a mutualist economy, based on independent and cooperative labour, differences in wealth would be vastly reduced, so ensuring that irrational aspects of the market that exist within capitalism would be minimised. The workings of supply and demand would provide a more just result than under the current system.

However, collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists reject the market. This rejection often implies, to some, central planning. As the market socialist David Schweickart puts it, "*[i]f profit considerations do not dictate resource usage and production techniques, then central direction must do so. If profit is not the goal of a productive organisation, then physical output (use values) must be.*" [**Against Capitalism**, p. 86]

However, Schweickart is wrong. Horizontal links need not be market based and cooperation between individuals and groups need not be hierarchical. Therefore, it is a question of distributing information between producers and consumers, information which the market often hides or activity blocks. This information network has partly been discussed in the [last section](#) where a method

of comparison between different materials, techniques and resources based upon use value was discussed. However, the need to indicate the current fluctuations in production and consumption needs to be indicated which complements that method.

In a non-Mutualist anarchist system it is assumed that confederations of collectives will wish to adjust they capacity if they are aware of the need to do so. Hence, price changes in response to changes in demand would not be necessary to provide the information that such changes are required. This is because a *"change in demand first becomes apparent as a change in the quantity being sold at existing prices [or being consumed in a moneyless system] and is therefore reflected in changes in stocks or orders. Such changes are perfectly good indicators or signals that an imbalance between demand and current output has developed. If a change in demand for its products proved to be permanent, a production unit would find its stocks being run down and its order book lengthening, or its stocks increasing and orders falling....Price changes in response to changes in demand are therefore not necessary for the purpose of providing information about the need to adjust capacity"* [Pat Devine, **Democracy and Economic Planning**, p. 242]

Therefore, to indicate the relative changes in scarcity of a given good it will be necessary to calculate a *"scarcity index."* This would inform potential users of this good so that they may effectively adjust their decisions in light of the decisions of others. This index could be, for example, a percentage value which indicates the relation of orders placed for a commodity to the amount actually produced. For example, a good which has a demand

higher than its supply would have an index value of 101% or higher. This value would inform potential users to start looking for substitutes for it or to economise on its use. Such a scarcity figure would exist for each collective as well as (possibly) a generalised figure for the industry as a whole on a regional, "national," etc. level. In this way, a specific good could be seen to be in high demand and so only those producers who **really** required it would place orders for it (so ensuring effective use of resources). Needless to say, stock levels and other basic book-keeping techniques would be utilised in order to ensure a suitable buffer level of a specific good to take into account unexpected changes in consumption. This may result in some excess supply of goods being produced and used as stock to buffer out unexpected changes in the aggregate demand for a good.

This, combined with cost-benefit analysis described in section [I.4.4](#), would allow information about changes within the "economy" to rapidly spread throughout the whole system and influence all decision makers without the great majority knowing anything about the original causes of these changes (which rest in the decisions of those directly affected). The relevant information is communicated to all involved, without having to be order by an "all-knowing" central body as in a Leninist centrally planned economy. As argued in section [I.1.2](#), anarchists have long realised that no centralised body could possibly be able to possess all the information dispersed throughout the economy and if such a body attempted to do so, the resulting bureaucracy would effectively reduce the amount of information available to society and so cause shortages and inefficiencies.

Therefore, each syndicate receives its own orders and supplies and sends its own produce out. Similarly, communal distribution centers would order required goods from syndicates it determines. In this way consumers can change to syndicates which respond to their needs and so production units are aware of what it is socially useful for them to produce as well as the social cost of the resources they need to produce it. In this way a network of horizontal relations spread across society, with coordination achieved by equality of association and not the hierarchy of the corporate structure. This system ensures a cooperative response to changes in supply and demand and so reduces the communication problems associated with the market which help causes periods of unemployment and economic downturn (see section [C.7.1](#)).

While anarchists are aware of the "isolation paradox" (see section [B.6](#)) this does not mean that they think the commune should make decisions **for** people on what they were to consume. This would be a prison. No, all anarchists agree that is up to the individual to determine their own needs and for the collectives they join to determine social requirements like parks, infrastructure improvements and so on. However, social anarchists think that it would be beneficial to discuss the framework around which these decisions would be made. This would mean, for example, that communes would agree to produce eco-friendly products, reduce waste and generally make decisions enriched by social interaction. Individuals would still decide which sort goods they desire, based on what the collectives produce but these goods would be based on a socially agreed agenda. In this way waste, pollution and other "externalities" of atomised consumption could be

reduced. For example, while it is rational for individuals to drive a car to work, collectively this results in massive **irrationality** (for example, traffic jams, pollution, illness, unpleasant social infrastructures). A sane society would discuss the problems associated with car use and would agree to produce a fully integrated public transport network which would reduce pollution, stress, illness, and so on.

Therefore, while anarchists recognise individual tastes and desires, they are also aware of the social impact of them and so try to create a social environment where individuals can enrich their personal decisions with the input of other people's ideas.

On a related subject, it is obvious that different collectives would produce slightly different goods, so ensuring that people have a choice. It is doubtful that the current waste implied in multiple products from different companies (sometimes the same company) all doing the same job would be continued in an anarchist. However, production will be "*variations on a theme*" in order to ensure consumer choice and to allow the producers to know what features consumers prefer. It would be impossible to sit down before hand and make a list of what features a good should have - that assumes perfect knowledge and that technology is fairly constant. Both these assumptions are of limited use in real life. Therefore, cooperatives would produce goods with different features and production would change to meet the demand these differences suggest (for example, factory A produces a new CD player, and consumption patterns indicate that this is popular and so the rest of the factories convert). This is in addition to R&D experiments and test populations. In this way consumer

choice would be maintained, and enhanced as consumers would be able to influence the decisions of the syndicates as producers (in some cases) and through syndicate/commune dialogue.

Therefore, anarchists do not ignore "supply and demand." Instead, they recognise the limitations of the capitalist version of this truism and point out that capitalism is based on **effective** demand which has no necessary basis with efficient use of resources. Instead of the market, social anarchists advocate a system based on horizontal links between producers which effectively communicates information across society about the relative changes in supply and demand which reflect actual needs of society and not bank balances. The response to changes in supply and demand will be discussed in section [1.4.7](#) (What are the criteria for investment decisions?) and section [1.4.13](#) (Who will do the dirty or unpleasant work?) will discuss the allocation of work tasks.

I.4.6 SURELY ANARCHIST-COMMUNISM WOULD JUST LEAD TO DEMAND EXCEEDING SUPPLY?

Its a common objection that free communism would lead to people wasting resources by taking more than they need. This is because *"free communism . . . places the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, p. 7] Without wages, it is claimed, resources would be wasted.

Indeed, some argue, what if an individual says they "need" a luxury house or a personal yacht? Simply put, workers may not "need" to produce for that need. As Tom Brown puts it, *"such things are the product of social labour. . . Under syndicalism. . .it is improbable that any greedy, selfish person would be able to kid a shipyard full of workers to build him a ship all for his own hoggish self. There would be steam luxury yachts, but they would be enjoyed in common."* [Syndicalism, p. 51]

So communist-anarchists are not blind to the fact that free access to products is based upon the actual work of real individuals - "society" provides nothing, individuals working together do. This is reflected in the classic statement of communism - *"From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs."* Therefore, the needs of both consumer **and** producer are taken into account. This means that if no syndicate or individual desires to produce a specific order an order then this order can be classed as an "unreasonable" demand - "unreasonable" in this context meaning that no one freely agrees to produce it. Of course, individuals may agree to barter services in order to get what they want produced if they **really** want something but such acts in no way undermines a communist society.

Therefore, communist-anarchist recognise that production, like consumption, must be based on freedom. However, it has been argued that free access would lead to waste as people take more than they would under capitalism. This objection is not as serious as it first appears. There are plenty of examples within current society to indicate that free access will not lead to abuses. Let us take three examples, public libraries,

water and pavements. In public libraries people are free to sit and read books all day. However, few if any actually do so. Neither do people always take the maximum number of books out at a time. No, they use the library as they need to and feel no need to maximise their use of the institution. Some people never use the library, although it is free. In the case of water supplies, its clear that people do not leave taps on all day because water is often supplied freely or for a fixed charge. Similarly with pavements, people do not walk everywhere because to do so is free. In both cases individuals use the resource as and when they need to.

We can expect a similar effect as other resources become freely available. In effect, this argument makes as much sense as arguing that individuals will travel to stops **beyond** their destination if public transport is based on a fixed charge! And only an idiot would travel further than required in order to get "value for money."

However, there is a deeper point to be made here about consumerism. Capitalism is based on hierarchy and not liberty. This leads to a weakening of individuality and a lose of self-identity and sense of community. Both these senses are a deep human need and consumerism is often a means by which people overcome their alienation from their selves and others (religion, ideology and drugs are other means of escape). Therefore the consumption within capitalism reflects **its** values, not some abstract "human nature." As Bob Black argues:

"what we want, what we are capable of wanting is relative to the forms of social organization. People 'want' fast food because they have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn't taste much

better anyway, because the nuclear family (for the dwindling minority who have even that to go home to) is too small and too stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating -- and so forth. It is only people who can't get what they want who resign themselves to want more of what they can get. Since we cannot be friends and lovers, we wail for more candy." [**Smokestack Lightning**]

Therefore, most anarchists think that consumerism is a product of a hierarchical society within which people are alienated from themselves and the means by which they can make themselves **really** happy (i.e. meaningful relationships, liberty, work, and experiences). Consumerism is a means of filling the spiritual hole capitalism creates within us by denying our freedom.

This means that capitalism produces individuals who define themselves by what they have, not who they are. This leads to consumption for the sake of consumption, as people try to make themselves happy by consuming more commodities. But, as Erich Fromm points out, this cannot work for and only leads to even more insecurity (and so even more consumption):

*"If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I? Nobody but a defeated, deflated, pathetic testimony to a wrong way of living. Because I **can** lose what I have, I am necessarily constantly worried that I **shall** lose what I have."* [**To Have Or To Be**, p. 111]

Such insecurity easily makes consumerism seem a "natural" way of life and so make communism seem impossible. However, rampant consumerism is far more a product of lack of meaningful freedom within an

alienated society than a "natural law" of human existence. In a society that encouraged and protected individuality by non-hierarchical social relationships and organisations, individuals would have a strong sense of self and so be less inclined to mindlessly consume. As Fromm puts it, "*If I am what I am and not what I have, nobody can deprive me of or threaten my security and my sense of identity. My centre is within myself.*" [Op. Cit., p. 112] Such self-centred individuals do not have to consume endlessly to build a sense of security or happiness within themselves (a sense which can never actually be created by those means).

In other words, the well-developed individuality that an anarchist society would develop would have less need to consume than the average person in a capitalist one. This is not to suggest that life will be bare and without luxuries in an anarchist society, far from it. An society based on the free expression of individuality could be nothing but rich in wealth and diverse in goods and experiences. What we arguing here is that an anarchist-communist society would not have to fear rampant consumerism making demand outstrip supply constantly and always precisely because freedom will result in a non-alienated society of well developed individuals.

Of course, this may sound totally utopian. Possibly it is, however as Oscar Wilde said, a map of the world without Utopia on it is not worth having. One thing is sure, if the developments we have outlined above fail to appear and attempts at communism fail due to waste and demand exceeding supply then a free society would make the necessary decisions and introduce some means of limiting supply (such as, for example, labour notes, equal wages, and so on). Whether or not full communism

can be introduced instantly is a moot point amongst anarchists, although most would like to see society develop towards a communist goal eventually.

I.4.7 WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR INVESTMENT DECISIONS?

Obviously, a given society needs to take into account changes in consumption and so invest in new means of production. An anarchist society is no different. As G.D.H Cole points out, *"it is essential at all times, and in accordance with considerations which vary from time to time, for a community to preserve a balance between production for ultimate use and production for use in further production. And this balance is a matter which ought to be determined by and on behalf of the whole community."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 144]

How this balance is determined varies according to the school of anarchist thought considered. All agree, however, that such an important task should be under effective community control. The mutualists see the solution to the problems of investment as creating a system of mutual banks, which reduce interest rates to zero. This would be achieved *"[b]y the organisation of credit, on the principle of reciprocity or mutualism. . . In such an organisation credit is raised to the dignity of a social function, managed by the community; and, as society never speculates upon its members, it will lend its credit . . . at the actual cost of transaction. "* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, p. 36] This would allow money to be made available to those who needed it and so break the back of the capitalist

business cycle (i.e. credit would be available as required, not when it was profitable for bankers to supply it) as well as capitalist property relations. Under a mutualist regime, credit for investment would be available from two sources. Firstly, an individual's or cooperatives own saved funds and, secondly, as zero interest loans from mutual banks, credit unions and other forms of credit associations. Loans would be allocated to projects which the mutual banks considered likely to succeed and repay the original loan.

Collectivist and communist anarchists recognise that credit is based on human activity, which is represented as money. As the Guild Socialist G.D.H. Cole pointed out, *"The understanding of this point [on investment] depends on a clear appreciation of the fact that all real additions to capital take the form of directing a part of the productive power of labour and using certain materials not for the manufacture of products and the rendering of services incidental to such manufacture for purposes of purposes of further production."* [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 143] Collectivist and Communist anarchists agree with their Mutualist cousins when they state that *"[a]ll credit presupposes labor, and, if labor were to cease, credit would be impossible"* and that the *"legitimate source of credit"* was *"the labouring classes"* who *"ought to control it"* and *"whose benefit [it should] be used"* [Charles A. Dana, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Therefore, in collectivism, investment funds would exist in the confederations of collectives, community "banks" and other such means by which depreciation funds could be stored and as well as other funds agreed to by the collectives (for example, collectives may agree to allocate a certain percentage of their labour notes to a

common account in order to have the necessary funds available for new investment). In a communist-anarchist society, the collectives would agree that a certain part of their output and activity will be directed to new means of production. In effect, each collective is able to draw upon the sums approved of by the Commune in the form of an agreed claim on the labour power of all the collectives. In this way, mutual aid ensures a suitable pool of resources for the future from which all benefit.

As to when investment is needed, its clear that this will be based on the changes in demand for goods. As Guilliame points it, "*[b]y means of statistics gathered from all the communes in a region, it will be possible to scientifically balance production and consumption. In line with these statistics, it will also be possible to add more help in industries where production is insufficient and reduce the number of men where there is a surplus of production.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 370] Obviously, investment in branches of production with a high demand would be essential and this would be easily seen from the statistics generated by the collectives and communes. Tom Brown states this obvious point:

"Goods, as now, will be produced in greater variety, for workers like producing different kinds, and new models, of goods. Now if some goods are unpopular, they will be left on the shelves. . . Of other goods more popular, the shops will be emptied. Surely it is obvious that the assistant will decrease his order of the unpopular line and increase his order of the popular." [Syndicalism, p. 55]

As a rule of thumb, syndicates that produce investment goods would be inclined to supply other syndicates who

are experiencing excess demand before others, all other things being equal. Such guidelines and communication between producers, investment would go to those industries that actually required them.

As production would be decentralised as far as possible, each locality would be able to understand its own requirements and apply them as it sees fit.

This, combined with an extensive communications network, would ensure that investment not only did not duplicate unused plant within the economy but that investments take into account the specific problems and opportunities each locality has. Of course, collectives would experiment with new lines and technology as well as existing lines and so invest in new technologies and products. As occurs under capitalism, extensive consumer testing would occur before dedicating major investment decisions to new products. In the case of new technology and plant, cost benefit analysis (as outlined in section [1.4.4](#)) would be used to determine which technology would produce the best results and whether changes should be made in plant stock.

Similarly with communities. A commune will obviously have to decide upon and plan civic investment (e.g. new parks, housing and so forth). They will also have the deciding say in industrial developments in their area as it would be unfair for syndicate to just decide to build a cement factory next to a housing cooperative if they did not want it. There is a case for arguing that the local commune will decide on investment decisions for syndicates in its area (for example, a syndicate may produce X plans which will be discussed in the local commune and 1 plan finalised from the debate). For

regional decisions (for example, a new hospital) would be decided at the appropriate level, with information fed from the health syndicate and consumer cooperatives. The actual location for investment decisions will be worked out by those involved. However, local syndicates must be the focal point for developing new products and investment plans in order to encourage innovation.

Therefore, under social anarchism no capital market is required to determine whether investment is required and what form it would take. The work that apologists for capitalism claim currently is done by the stock market can be replaced by cooperation and communication between workplaces in a decentralised, confederated network. The relative needs of different consumers of a product can be evaluated by the producers and an informed decision reached on where it would best be used.

Without a capital market, housing, workplaces and so on will no longer be cramped into the smallest space possible. Instead, housing, schools, hospitals, workplaces and so on will be built within a "green" environment. This means that human constructions will be placed within a natural environment and no longer stand apart from it. In this way human life can be enriched and the evils of cramping as many humans and things into a small a space as is "economical" can be overcome.

In addition, the stock market is hardly the means by which capital is actually raised within capitalism. As Engler points out, *"Supporters of the system... claim that stock exchanges mobilise funds for business. Do they? When people buy and sell shares, 'no investment goes into company treasuries... Shares simply change hands*

for cash in endless repetition.' Company treasuries get funds only from new equity issues. These accounted for an average of a mere 0.5 per cent of shares trading in the US during the 1980s." [**Apostles of Greed**, pp. 157-158] And it hardly needs to be repeated that capitalism results in production being skewed away from the working class and that the "efficiency" of market allocation is highly suspect.

Only by taking investment decisions away from "experts" and placing it in the hands of ordinary people will current generations be able to invest according to their, and future generations, self-interest. It is hardly in our interest to have a institution whose aim is to make the wealthy even wealthier and on whose whims are dependent the lives of millions of people.

I.4.8 WHAT ABOUT FUNDING FOR BASIC RESEARCH?

In a libertarian-socialist society, people are likely to "vote" to allocate significant amounts of resources for basic research from the available social output. This is because the results of this research would be freely available to all enterprises and so would aid everyone in the long term. In addition, because workers directly control their workplace and the local community effectively "owns" it, all affected would have an interest in exploring research which would reduce labour, pollution, raw materials and so on or increase output with little or no social impact.

This means that research and innovation would be in the direct interests of everyone involved. Under capitalism,

this is not the case. Most research is conducted in order to get an edge in the market by increasing productivity or expanding production into new (previously unwanted) areas. Any increased productivity often leads to unemployment, deskilling and other negative effects for those involved. Libertarian socialism will not face this problem.

It should also be mentioned here that research would be pursued more and more as people take an increased interest in both their own work and education. As people become liberated from the grind of everyday life, they will explore possibilities as their interests take them and so research will take place on many levels within society - in the workplace, in the community, in education and so on.

In addition, it should be noted that basic research is not something which capitalism does well. The rise of the Pentagon system in the USA indicates that basic research often needs state support in order to be successful. As Kenneth Arrow noted over thirty years ago that market forces are insufficient to promote basic research:

"Thus basic research, the output of which is only used as an informational input into other inventive activities, is especially unlikely to be rewarded. In fact, it is likely to be of commercial value to the firm undertaking it only if other firms are prevented from using the information. But such restriction reduces the efficiency of inventive activity in general, and will therefore reduce its quantity also" ["*Economic Welfare and the Allocation of Resources for Inventiveness*," in National Bureau of Economic Research, **The Rate and Direction of Inventive Activity**, Princeton Univ. Press, 1962, p. 618].

Would modern society have produced so many innovations if it had not been for the Pentagon system, the space race and so on? Taking the Internet, for example, it is unlikely that this would have got off the ground if it had not been for the state.

I.4.9 SHOULD TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE BE SEEN AS ANTI-ANARCHISTIC?

Not necessarily. Because technology allows us to "do more with less," technological progress can improve standards of living for all people, and technologies can be used to increase personal freedom: medical technology, for instance, can free people from the scourges of pain, illness, and a "naturally" short lifespan; agricultural technology can be used to free labor from the mundane chore of food production; advanced communications technology can enhance our ability to freely associate. The list goes on and on. However, most anarchists agree with Kropotkin when he pointed out that the *"development of [the industrial] technique at last gives man [sic!] the opportunity to free himself from slavish toil."* [Ethics, p.2]

Of course technology be used for oppressive ends, as indicated in section [D.10](#). Human knowledge, like all things, can be used to increase freedom or to decrease it. Technology is neither "good," nor "bad" per se, but may be used for either. What can be said is that in a hierarchical society, technology will be introduced by serves the interests of the powerful and helps marginalise and disempower the majority. This means that in an anarchist society, technology would be developed which

empowered those who used it, so reducing any oppressive aspects of it, and, in the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, the "*conscious transformation of technology will . . . be a central task of a society of free workers.*" [**Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 13]

For example, increased productivity under capitalism usually leads to further exploitation, displaced workers, etc. But it doesn't have to in an anarchist world. By way of example, consider a small, self-sufficient group in which all resources are distributed equally amongst the members. Let's say that this group has 5 people and, for the sake of argument, 20 man-hours of production per week is spent on baking bread for the group. Now, what happens if the introduction of automation reduces the amount of labor required for bread production to 5 man-hours per week? Clearly, no one stands to lose - even if someone's work is "displaced", that person will continue to receive the same resource income as before - and they might even gain. This last is due to the fact that 15 man-hours have been freed up from the task of bread production, and those man-hours may now be used elsewhere or converted to leisure, either way increasing each person's standard of living.

Obviously, this happy outcome derives not only from the technology, but from its use in an equitable economic system. Certainly, a wide variety of outcomes would be possible under alternative allocations. Yet, we have managed to prove our point: in the end, there's no reason why increases in productivity need lead to a lower standard of living! Therefore, "*[f]or the first time in the history of civilisation, mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of*

the needs themselves. To impose, therefore, as hitherto been done, the curse of misery and degradation upon vast divisions of mankind, in order to secure well-being and further development for the few, is needed no more: well-being can be secured for all, without placing on anyone the burden of oppressive, degrading toil and humanity can at last build its entire social life on the bases of justice" [Ethics, p. 2]

Its for these reasons that anarchists have held a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship between human knowledge and anarchism. Some, such as Peter Kropotkin, were themselves scientists and saw great potential for the use of advanced technology to expand human freedom. Others have held technology at arm's length, concerned about its oppressive uses, and a few have rejected science and technology completely. All of these are, of course, possible anarchist positions. But most anarchists support Kropotkin's viewpoint, but with a healthy dose of practical Luddism when viewing how technology is (ab)used in capitalism.

So technological advancement is important in a free society in order to maximise the free time available for everyone and replace mindless toil with meaningful work. The means of so doing is the use of **appropriate** technology (and **not** the worship of technology as such). Only by critically evaluating technology and introducing such forms which empower, are understandable and are controllable by individuals and communities as well as minimising ecological distribution (in other words, what is termed appropriate technology) can this be achieved. Only this critical approach to technology can do justice to the power of the human mind and reflect the creative powers which developed the technology in the first

place. Unquestioning acceptance of technological progress is just as bad as being unquestioning anti-technology.

So whether technological advance is a good thing or sustainable depends on the choices we make, and on the social, political, and economic systems we use. We live in a universe which contains effectively infinite resources of matter and energy, yet at the moment we are stuck on a planet whose resources can only be stretched so far. Anarchists (and others) differ as to their assessments of how much development the earth can take, and of the best course for future development, but there's no reason to believe that advanced technological societies per se cannot be sustained into the foreseeable future if they are structured and used properly.

I.4.10 WHAT WOULD BE THE ADVANTAGE OF A WIDE BASIS OF SURPLUS DISTRIBUTION?

We noted earlier ([H.4](#)) that competition between syndicates can lead to "petty-bourgeois cooperativism," and that to eliminate this problem, the basis of collectivisation needs to be widened so that surpluses are distributed industry-wide or even society-wide. We also pointed out another advantage of a wide surplus distribution: that it allows for the consolidation of enterprises that would otherwise compete, leading to a more efficient allocation of resources and technical improvements. Here we will back up this claim with illustrations from the Spanish Revolution.

Collectivization in Catalonia embraced not only major industries like municipal transportation and utilities, but smaller establishments as well: small factories, artisan workshops, service and repair shops, etc. Augustin Souchy describes the process as follows: *"The artisans and small workshop owners, together with their employees and apprentices, often joined the union of their trade. By consolidating their efforts and pooling their resources on a fraternal basis, the shops were able to undertake very big projects and provide services on a much wider scale. . . . The collectivisation of the hairdressing shops provides an excellent example of how the transition of a small-scale manufacturing and service industry from capitalism to socialism was achieved."*

"Before July 19th, 1936 [the date of the Revolution], there were 1,100 hairdressing parlors in Barcelona, most of them owned by poor wretches living from hand to mouth. The shops were often dirty and ill-maintained. The 5,000 hairdressing assistants were among the most poorly paid workers. . . . Both owners and assistants therefore voluntarily decided to socialize all their shops."

"How was this done? All the shops simply joined the union. At a general meeting they decided to shut down all the unprofitable shops. The 1,100 shops were reduced to 235 establishments, a saving of 135,000 pesetas per month in rent, lighting, and taxes. The remaining 235 shops were modernized and elegantly outfitted." From the money saved, income per worker was increased by 40 percent, with everyone having the right to work and all earning the same amount. "The former owners were not adversely affected by socialization. They were employed at a steady income. All worked together under equal conditions and equal pay. The distinction between

employers and employees was obliterated and they were transformed into a working community of equals -- socialism from the bottom up" [*"Collectivisation in Catalonia,"* in Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 93-94].

Therefore, cooperation ensures that resources are efficiently allocated and waste is minimised by cutting down needless competition. As consumers have choices in which syndicate to consume from as well as having direct communication between consumer cooperatives and productive units, there is little danger that rationalisation in production will hurt the interests of the consumer.

I.4.11 IF LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM ELIMINATES THE PROFIT MOTIVE, WON'T CREATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE SUFFER?

According to Alfie Kohn, a growing body of psychological research suggests that rewards can lower performance levels, especially when the performance involves creativity [*"Studies Find Reward Often No Motivator,"* **Boston Globe**, Monday 19 January 1987]. Kohn notes that *"a related series of studies shows that intrinsic interest in a task -- the sense that something is worth doing for its own sake -- typically declines when someone is rewarded for doing it."*

Much of the research on creativity and motivation has been performed by Theresa Amabile, associate professor of psychology at Brandeis University. One of her recent experiments involved asking elementary school and college students to make "silly" collages. The young

children were also asked to invent stories. Teachers who rated the projects found that those students who had contracted for rewards did the least creative work. *"It may be that commissioned work will, in general, be less creative than work that is done out of pure interest,"* Amabile says.

In 1985, Amabile asked 72 creative writers at Brandeis and at Boston University to write poetry. *"Some students then were given a list of extrinsic (external) reasons for writing, such as impressing teachers, making money and getting into graduate school, and were asked to think about their own writing with respect to these reasons. Others were given a list of intrinsic reasons: the enjoyment of playing with words, satisfaction from self-expression, and so forth. A third group was not given any list. All were then asked to do more writing.*

"The results were clear. Students given the extrinsic reasons not only wrote less creatively than the others, as judged by 12 independent poets, but the quality of their work dropped significantly. Rewards, Amabile says, have this destructive effect primarily with creative tasks, including higher-level problem-solving. The more complex the activity, the more it's hurt by extrinsic reward, she said" [Ibib.].

In another study, by James Gabarino of Chicago's Erikson Institute for Advanced Studies in Child Development, it was found that girls in the fifth and sixth grades tutored younger children much less effectively if they were promised free movie tickets for teaching well. *"The study, showed that tutors working for the reward took longer to communicate ideas, got frustrated more*

easily, and did a poorer job in the end than those who were not rewarded" [Ibib.]

Such studies cast doubt on the claim that financial reward is the only effective way -- or even the best way - - to motivate people. As Kohn notes, *"[t]hey also challenge the behaviorist assumption that any activity is more likely to occur if it is rewarded."* Amabile concludes that her research *"definitely refutes the notion that creativity can be operantly conditioned."*

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These findings re-inforce the findings of other scientific fields. Biology, social psychology, ethnology and anthropology all present evidence that support cooperation as the natural basis for human interaction. For example, ethnological studies indicate that virtually all indigenous cultures operate on the basis of highly cooperative relationships and anthropologists have presented evidence to show that the predominant force driving early human evolution was cooperative social interaction, leading to the capacity of hominids to develop culture. This is even sinking into capitalism, with industrial psychology now promoting "worker participation" and team functioning because it is decisively more productive than hierarchical management. More importantly, the evidence shows that cooperative workplaces are more productive than those

organized on other principles. All other things equal, producers' cooperatives will be more productive than capitalist or state enterprises, on average. Cooperatives can often achieve higher productivity even when their equipment and conditions are worse. Furthermore, the better the organization approximates the cooperative ideal, the better the productivity.

All this is unsurprising to social anarchists (and it should make individualist anarchists reconsider their position). Peter Kropotkin (in **Mutual Aid**) asserted that, "[i]f we . . . ask Nature: 'who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?' we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization." From his observation that mutual aid gives evolutionary advantage to living beings, he derived his political philosophy--a philosophy which stressed community and cooperative endeavor.

Modern research has reinforced his argument. For example, Alfie Kohn is also the author of **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and he spent seven years reviewing more than 400 research studies dealing with competition and cooperation. Prior to his investigation, he believed that "*competition can be natural and appropriate and healthy.*" After reviewing research findings, he radically revised this opinion, concluding that, "*The ideal amount of competition . . . in any environment, the classroom, the workplace, the family, the playing field, is none . . . [Competition] is*

always destructive." [Noetic Sciences Review, Spring 1990]

Here was present a very short summary of his findings. According to Kohn, there are three principle consequences of competition: Firstly, it has a negative effect on productivity and excellence. This is due to increased anxiety, inefficiency (as compared to cooperative sharing of resources and knowledge), and the undermining of inner motivation. Competition shifts the focus to victory over others, and away from intrinsic motivators such as curiosity, interest, excellence, and social interaction. Studies show that cooperative behaviour, by contrast, consistantly predicts good performance--a finding which holds true under a wide range of subject variables. Interestingly, the positive benefits of cooperation become more significant as tasks become more complex, or where greater creativity and problem-solving ability is required (as indicated above).

Secondly, competition lowers self-esteem and hampers the development of sound, self-directed individuals. A strong sense of self is difficult to attain when self-evaluation is dependent on seeing how we measure up to others. On the other hand, those whose identity is formed in relation to how they contribute to group efforts generally possess greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem.

Finally, competition undermines human relationships. Humans are social beings; we best express our humanness in interaction with others. By creating winners and losers, competition is destructive to human unity and prevents close social feeling.

Anarchists have long argued these points. In the competitive mode, people work at cross purposes, or purely for (material) personal gain. This leads to an impoverishment of society and hierarchy, with a lack of communal relations that result in an impoverishment of all the individuals involved (mentally, spiritually, ethically and, ultimately, materially). This not only leads to a weakening of individuality and social disruption, but also to economic inefficiency as energy is wasted in class conflict and invested in building bigger and better cages to protect the haves from the have-nots. Instead of creating useful things, human activity is spent in useless toil reproducing an unjust and authoritarian system.

All in all, the results of competition (as documented by a host of scientific disciplines) shows its poverty as well as indicating that cooperation is the means by which the fittest survive.

I.4.12 WON'T THERE BE A TENDENCY FOR CAPITALIST ENTERPRISE TO REAPPEAR IN ANY SOCIALIST SOCIETY?

This is a common right-libertarian objection. Robert Nozick, for example, imagines the following scenario: *"[S]mall factories would spring up in a socialist society, unless forbidden. I melt some of my personal possessions and build a machine out of the material. I offer you and others a philosophy lecture once a week in exchange for yet other things, and so on. . . .some persons might even want to leave their jobs in socialist industry and work full time in this private sector. [this is] how private property even in means of production would occur in a socialist society."* Hence Nozick claims that *"the*

socialist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults." [**Anarchy, State and Utopia**, pp. 162-3]

As Jeff Stein points out, however, *"the only reason workers want to be employed by capitalists is because they have no other means for making a living, no access to the means of production other than by selling themselves. For a capitalist sector to exist there must be some form of private ownership of productive resources, and a scarcity of alternatives. The workers must be in a condition of economic desperation for them to be willing to give up an equal voice in the management of their daily affairs and accept a boss"* ["Market Anarchism? Caveat Emptor!"], a review of **A Structured Anarchism : An Overview of Libertarian Theory and Practice** by John Griffin, **Libertarian Labor Review** #13, Winter 1992-93, pp. 33-39].

In an anarchist society, there is no need for anyone to "forbid" capitalist acts. All people have to do is **refrain** from helping would-be capitalists set up monopolies of productive assets. This is because, as we have noted in [B.3](#), capitalism cannot exist without some form of state to protect such monopolies. In a libertarian-socialist society, of course, there would be no state to begin with, and so there would be no question of it "refraining" from doing anything, including protecting would-be capitalists' monopolies of the means of production. In other words, would-be capitalists would face stiff competition for workers in an anarchist society. This is because self-managed workplaces would be able to offer workers more benefits (such as self-government) than the would-be capitalist ones. The would-be capitalists would have to offer not only excellent wages and

conditions but also, in all likelihood, workers' control and hire-purchase on capital used. The chances of making a profit once the various monopolies associated with capitalism are abolished are slim.

It should be noted that Nozick makes a serious error in his case. He assumes that the "use rights" associated with an anarchist (i.e. socialist) society are identical to the "property rights" of a capitalist one. This is **not** the case, and so his argument is weakened and loses its force. Simply put, there is no such thing as an absolute or "natural" law of property. As J.S. Mill points out, *"powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society."* ["Chapters on Socialism," **John Stuart Mill on Politics and Society**, p. 354] Therefore, Nozick slips an ideological ringer into his example by erroneously interpreting socialism (or any other society for that matter) as specifying a distribution of private property (like those he, and other supporters of capitalism, believes in) along with the wealth.

In other words, Nozick assumes that in **all** societies property rights must replace use rights in both consumption **and** production (an assumption that is ahistorical in the extreme). As Cheyney C. Ryan comments, *"Different conceptions of justice differ not only in how they would apportion society's holdings but in what rights individuals have over their holdings once they have been apportioned."* ["Property Rights and Individual Liberty", in **Reading Nozack**, p. 331]

In effect, what possessions someone holds within a libertarian socialist society will not be his or her property (in the capitalist sense) any more than a company car is

the property of the employee under capitalism. This means that as long as an individual remained a member of a commune then they would have full use of the resources of that commune and could use their possessions as they saw fit. Such lack of **absolute** "ownership" not reduce liberty any more than the employee and the company car he or she uses (bar destruction, the employee can use it as they see fit).

Notice also that Nozick confuses exchange with capitalism (*"I offer you a lecture once a week in exchange for other things"*). This is a telling mistake by someone who claims to be an expert on capitalism, because the defining feature of capitalism is not exchange (which obviously took place long before capitalism existed) but labor contracts involving capitalist middlemen who appropriate a portion of the value produced by workers - in other words, wage labour. Nozick's example is merely a direct labor contract between the producer and the consumer. It does not involve any capitalist intermediary taking a percentage of the value created by the producer. It is only this latter type of transaction that libertarian socialism prevents -- and not by "forbidding" it but simply by refusing to maintain the conditions necessary for it to occur, i.e. protection of capitalist property.

Lastly, we must also note that Nozick also ignores the fact that acquisition **must** come before transfer, meaning that before "consenting" capitalist acts occur, individual ones must precede it. As argued above, for this to happen the would-be capitalist must steal communally owned resources by barring others from using them. This obviously would restrict the liberty of those who currently used them and so be hotly opposed by

members of a community. If an individual did desire to use resources to employ wage labour then they would have effectively removed themselves from "socialist society" and so that society would bar them from using **its** resources (i.e. they would have to buy access to all the resources they currently took for granted).

It should also be noted here that Nozick's theory does not provide any support for such appropriation of commonly held resources, meaning that his (right) libertarianism is totally without foundations. His argument in favour of such appropriations recognises that certain liberties are very definitely restricted by private property (and it should be kept in mind that the destruction of commonly held resources, such as village commons, were enforced by the state - see section [F.8.3](#)). As Cheyney C. Ryan points out, Nozick *"invoke[s] personal liberty as the decisive ground for rejecting patterned principles of justice [such as socialism] and restrictions on the ownership of capital. . .[b]ut where the rights of private property admittedly restrict the liberties of the average person, he seems perfectly happy to **trade off** such liberties against material gain for society as a whole."* [*"Property Rights and Individual Liberty"*, in **Reading Nozack**, p. 339]

Again, as pointed out in section [F.2](#) (What do "anarcho"-capitalists mean by "freedom?") right-libertarians would better be termed "Propertarians." Why is liberty accorded a primary importance when arguing against socialism but not private property restricts liberty? Obviously, Nozick considers the liberties associated with private property as more important than liberty **in general**. Likewise, capitalism must forbid corresponding socialist acts by individuals (for example, squatting

unused property) and often socialist acts between consenting individuals (i.e. the formation of unions).

So, to conclude, this question involves some strange logic (and many question begging assumptions) and ultimately fails in its attempt to prove libertarian socialism must "ban" "capitalistic acts between individuals." In addition, the objection undermines capitalism because it cannot support the creation of private property out of communal property in the first place.

I.4.13 WHO WILL DO THE DIRTY OR UNPLEASANT WORK?

That depends on the kind of community you are a member of. Obviously, few would argue against the idea that individuals will voluntarily work at things they enjoyed doing. However there are some jobs that few, if any, would enjoy (for example, collecting rubbish, processing sewage, dangerous work, etc.). So how would an anarchist society deal with it?

It will be clear what is considered unpleasant work in any society - few people (if any) will volunteer to do it. As in any advanced society, communities and syndicates who required extra help would inform others of their need by the various form of media that existed. In addition, it would be likely that each community would have a "*division of activity*" syndicate whose work would be to distribute information about these posts and to which members of a community would go to discover what placements existed for the line of "work" they were interested in. So we have a means by which syndicates

and communes can ask for new hands and the means by which individuals can discover these placements. Obviously, some work will still require qualifications and that will be taken into account when syndicates and communes "advertise" for help.

For "work" placements that in which supply exceeded demand, it would be easy to arrange a work share scheme to ensure that most people get a chance to do that kind of work (see below for a discussion of what could happen if the numbers applying for a certain form of work were too high for this to work). When such placements are marked by an excess of demand by supply, its obvious that the activity in question is not viewed as pleasant or desirable. Until such time as it can be automated away, a free society will have to encourage people to volunteer for "work" placements they do not particularly want to do.

So, it is obvious that not all "jobs" are equal in interest or enjoyment. It is sometimes argued that people would start to join or form syndicates which are involved in more fun activities. By this process excess workers would be found in the more enjoyable "jobs" while the boring and dangerous ones would suffer from a scarcity of willing workers. Hence, so the argument goes, a socialist society would have to force people to do certain jobs and so that requires a state. Obviously this argument ignores the fact that under capitalism usually its the boring, dangerous work which is the least well paid with the worse working conditions. In addition this argument ignores the fact that under workers self-management boring, dangerous work would be minimised and transformed as much as possible. Only under capitalist hierarchy are people in no position to improve the

quality of their work and working environment. As George Barret argues:

"Now things are so strangely organised at present that it is just the dirty and disagreeable work that men will do cheaply, and consequently there is no great rush to invent machines to take their place. In a free society, on the other hand, it is clear that the disagreeable work will be one of the first things that machinery will be called upon to eliminate. It is quite fair to argue, therefore, that the disagreeable work will, to a large extent, disappear in a state of anarchism." [**Objections to Anarchism**]

Moreover, most anarchists would think that the argument that there would be a flood of workers taking up "easy" workplacements is abstract and ignores the dynamics of a real society. While many individuals would try to create new productive syndicates in order to express themselves in innovative work outwith the existing research and development going on within existing syndicates, the idea that the majority of individuals would leave their current work at a drop of a hat is crazy. A workplace is a community and part of a community and people would value the links they have with their fellow workers. As such they would be aware of the impacts of their decisions on both themselves and society as a whole. So, while we would expect a turn over of workers between syndicates, the mass transfers claimed in this argument are unlikely. Most workers who did want to try their hand a new work would apply for work places at syndicates that required new people, not create their own ones. Because of this, work transfers would be moderate and easily handled.

However, the possibility of mass desertions does exist and so must be addressed. So how would a libertarian socialist society deal with a majority of its workers deciding to all do interesting work, leaving the boring and/or dangerous work undone? It, of course, depends on the type of anarchism in question and is directly related to the question of who will do the "dirty work" in an anarchist society. So, how will an anarchist society ensure that individual preferences for certain types of work matches the requirements of social demand for labour?

Under mutualism, those who desired a certain form of work done would reach an agreement with a workers or a cooperative and pay them to do the work in question. Individuals would form cooperatives with each cooperative would have to find its place on the market and so this would ensure that work was spread across society as required. Individuals desiring to form a new cooperative would either provide their own start up credit or arrange a interest free loan from a mutual bank. However, this could lead to some people doing unpleasant work all the time and so is hardly a solution. As in capitalism, we may see some people doing terrible work because it is better than no work at all. This is a solution few anarchists would support.

In a collectivist or communist anarchist society, such an outcome would be avoided by sharing such tasks as fairly as possible between a community's members. For example, by allocating one day in a month to all fit members of a community to do work which no one volunteers to do, it would soon be done. This, however, may not prove to be possible in some "work" placements. Possible solutions could be to take into account the

undesirability of the work when considering the level of labour notes received or communal hours worked.

In other words, in a collectivist society the individuals who do unpleasant work may be "rewarded" (along with social esteem) with a slightly higher pay - the number of labour notes, for example, for such work would be a multiple of the standard amount, the actual figure being related to how much supply exceeds demand. In a communist society, the number of necessary hours required by an individual would be reduced by an amount that corresponds to the undesirability of the work involved. The actual levels of "reward" would be determined by agreements between the syndicates.

To be more precise, in a collectivist society, individuals would either use their own savings and/or arrange loans of community labour banks for credit in order to start up a new syndicate. This will obviously restrict the number of new syndicates being formed. In the case of individuals joining existing syndicates, the labour value of the work done would be related to the number of people interested in doing that work. For example, if a given type of work has 50% more people wanting to do it than actually required, then the labour value for one hours work in this industry would correspondingly be less than one hour. If it is in excess, then the labour value would increase, as would holiday time, etc.

In this way, "supply and demand" for workers would soon approximate each other. In addition, a collectivist society would be better placed than the current system to ensure work-sharing and other methods to spread unpleasant and pleasant tasks equally around society.

A communist-anarchist society's solution would be similar to the collectivist one. There would still be basic agreements between its members for work done and so for workplacements with excess supply of workers the amount of hours necessary to meet the confederations agreed minimum would correspondingly increase. For example, an industry with 100% excess supply of volunteers would see its minimum requirement increase from (say) 20 hours a week to 30 hours. An industry with less applicants than required would see the number of required hours of "work" decrease, plus increases in holiday time and so on. As G.D.H. Cole argues in respect of this point:

"Let us first by the fullest application of machinery and scientific methods eliminate or reduce . . . 'dirty work' that admit to such treatment. This has never been tried. . . under capitalism. . . It is cheaper to exploit and ruin human beings. . . Secondly, let us see what forms of 'dirty work' we can do without . . . [and] if any form of work is not only unpleasant but degrading, we will do without it, whatever the cost. No human being ought to be allowed or compelled to do work that degrades. Thirdly, for what dull or unpleasant work remains, let us offer whatever special conditions are required to attract the necessary workers, not in higher pay, but in shorter hours, holidays extending over six months in the year, conditions attractive enough to men who have other uses for their time or attention to being the requisite number to undertake it voluntarily." [**Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 76]

By these methods a balance between industrial sectors would be achieved as individuals would balance their desire for interesting work with their desires for free

time. Over time, by using the power of appropriate technology, even such time keeping would be minimised or even got rid of as society developed freely.

And it is important to remember that the means of production required by new syndicates do not fall from the sky. Other members of society will have to work to produce the required goods. Therefore it is likely that the syndicates and communes would agree that only a certain (maximum) percentage of production would be allocated to start-up syndicates (as opposed to increasing the resources of existing confederations). Such a figure would obviously be revised periodically in order to take into account changing circumstances. Members of the community who decide to form syndicates for new productive tasks or syndicates which do the same work but are independent of existing confederations would have to get the agreement of other workers to supply them with the necessary means of production (just as today they have to get the agreement of a bank to receive the necessary credit to start a new business). By budgeting the amounts available, a free society can ensure that individual desires for specific kinds of work can be matched with the requirements of society for useful production.

And we must point out (just to make sure we are not misunderstood) that there will be no group of "planners" deciding which applications for resources get accepted. Instead, individuals and associations would apply to different production units for resources, whose workers in turn decide whether to produce the goods requested. If it is within the syndicate's agreed budget then it is likely that they will produce the required materials. In this way, a communist-anarchist society will ensure the maximum

amount of economic freedom to start new syndicates and join existing ones plus ensure that social production does not suffer in the process.

Of course, no system is perfect - we are sure that not everyone will be able to do the work they enjoy the most (and that is the case under capitalism we may add). In an anarchist society ever method of ensuring that individuals pursue the work they are interested in would be investigated. If a possible solution can be found, we are sure that it will. What a free society would make sure of was that neither the capitalist market redeveloped (which ensures that the majority are marginalised into wage slavery) or a state socialist "labour army" type allocation process developed (which would ensure that free socialism did not remain free or socialist for long).

In this manner, anarchism will be able to ensure the principle of voluntary labour and free association as well as making sure that unpleasant and unwanted "work" is done. Moreover, most anarchists are sure that in a free society such requirements to encourage people to volunteer for unpleasant work will disappear over time as feelings of mutual aid and solidarity become more and more common place. Indeed, it is likely that people will gain respect for doing jobs that others might find unpleasant and so it might become "glamorous" to do such activity. Showing off to friends can be a powerful stimulus in doing any activity. So, anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they say that:

"In a society that makes every effort to depreciate the esteem that derives from anything other than conspicuous consumption, it is not surprising that great income differentials are seen as necessary to induce

*effort. But to assume that only conspicuous consumption can motivate people because under capitalism we have strained to make it so is unwarranted. There is plenty of evidence that people can be moved to great sacrifices for reasons other than a desire for personal wealth...there is good reason to believe that for nonpathological people wealth is generally coveted only as a **means** of attaining other ends such as economic security, comfort, social esteem, respect, status, or power."* [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 52]

We should note here that the education syndicates would obviously take into account the trends in "work" placement requirements when deciding upon the structure of their classes. In this way, education would respond to the needs of society as well as the needs of the individual (as would any productive syndicate).

I.4.14 WHAT ABOUT THE PERSON WHO WILL NOT WORK?

Anarchism is based on voluntary labour. If people do not desire to work then they cannot (must not) be forced to. However, this does not mean that an anarchist society will continue to feed, clothe, house someone who can produce but refuses to. As Camillo Berneri points out, anarchism is based upon *"no compulsion to work, but no duty towards those who do not want to work."* [*The Problem of Work*", in **Why Work?** ed. Vernon Richards, p. 74]

Obviously, there is a difference between not wanting to work and being unable to work. The sick, children, the old, pregnant women and so on will be looked after by

their friends and family. As child rearing will be considered "work" along with other more obviously economic tasks, mothers and fathers will not have to leave their children unattended and work to make ends meet. Instead, consideration will be given to the needs of both parents and children as well as the creation of community nurseries and child care centres.

So, in an anarchist society, individual's have two options, either they can join a commune and work together as equals, or they can work as an individual or independent cooperative and exchange the product of their labour with others. If an individual joins a commune and does not carry their weight, even after their fellow workers ask them to, then that person will possibly be expelled and given enough land, tools or means of production to work alone. Of course, if a person is depressed, run down or otherwise finding it hard to join in communal responsibilities then their friends and fellow workers would do everything in their power to help and be flexible in their approach to the problem.

So people will have to work, but how they do so will be voluntary. If people didn't work society would obviously fall apart and to let some live off the labour of those who do work would be a reversion to capitalism. However, most social anarchists think that the problem of people trying not to work would be a very minor one in an anarchist society. This is because work is part of human life to express oneself. With work being voluntary and self-managed, it will become like current day hobbies and many people work harder at their hobbies than they do at work. It is the nature of employment under capitalism that makes it "work" instead of pleasure.

Work need not be a part of the day that we wish would end.

This, combined with the workday being shortened, will help ensure that only an idiot would desire to work alone. As Malatesta argued, the *"individual who wished to supply his own material needs by working alone would be the slave of his labours."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 15]

So, enlightened self-interest would secure the voluntary labour and egalitarian distribution anarchists favour in the vast majority of the population. The parasitism associated with capitalism would be a thing of the past.

I.4.15 WHAT WILL THE WORKPLACE OF TOMORROW LOOK LIKE?

Given the anarchist desire to liberate the artist in all of us, we can easily imagine that a free society would transform totally the working environment. No longer would workers be indifferent to their workplaces, but they would express themselves in transforming them into pleasant places, integrated into both the life of the local community and into the local environment.

A glimpse of the future workplace can be seen from the actual class struggle. In the 40 day sit-down strike at Fisher Body plant #1 in Flint, Michigan in 1936, *"there was a community of two thousand strikers . . . Committees organised recreation, information, classes, a postal service, sanitation. . . There were classes in parliamentary procedure, public speaking, history of the*

labour movement. Graduate students at the University of Michigan gave courses in journalism and creative writing." [Howard Zinn, **A People's History of the United States**, p. 391]

Therefore the workplace would be expanded to include education and classes in individual development. This would allow work to become part of a wider community, drawing in people from different areas to share their knowledge and learn new insights and ideas. In addition, children would have part of their school studies with workplaces, getting them aware of the practicalities of many different forms of work and so allowing them to make informed decisions in what sort of activity they would be interested in pursuing when they were older.

Obviously, a workplace managed by its workers would also take care to make the working environment as pleasant as possible. No more "sick building syndrome" or unhealthy and stressful work areas. Buildings would be designed to maximise space and allow individual expression within them. Outside the workplace, we can imagine it surrounded by gardens and allotments which were tended by workers themselves, giving a pleasant surrounding to the workplace.

Therefore the future workplace would be an expression of the desires of those who worked there. It would be based around a pleasant working environment, within gardens and with extensive library, resources for education classes and other leisure activities. All this, and more, will be possible in a society based upon self-realisation and self-expression and one in which individuality is not crushed by authority and capitalism. Such a vision is possible and is only held back by

capitalism which denounces such visions of freedom as "uneconomic" However, as William Morris points out:

"Impossible I hear an anti-Socialist say. My friend, please to remember that most factories sustain today large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks . . .only the said gardens, etc. are twenty miles away from the factory, out of the smoke, and are kept up for one member of the factory only, the sleeping partner to wit"
[**A Factory as It Might Be**, pp. 7-8]

Pleasant working conditions based upon the self-management of work can produce a workplace within which economic "efficiency" can be achieved without disrupting and destroying individuality and the environment.

I.5 WHAT COULD THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF ANARCHY LOOK LIKE?

The social and political structure of anarchy is parallel to that of the economic structure, i.e., it is based on a voluntary federation of decentralized, directly democratic policy-making bodies, the neighborhood and community assemblies. In these grassroots political units, the concept of "self-management" becomes that of municipal self-government, a form of civic organization in which people take back control of their living places from the bureaucratic state and the capitalist class whose interests it serves. As Kropotkin argued, *"socialism must become **more popular**, more communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more **self-governing**."* [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 185]

This empowerment of ordinary citizens through decentralization and direct democracy will eliminate the alienation and apathy that are now rampant in the modern city, and (as always happens when people are free) unleash a flood of innovation in dealing with the social breakdown now afflicting our urban wastelands. The gigantic metropolis with its hierarchical and impersonal administration, its atomised and isolated "residents," will be transformed into a network of humanly scaled participatory communities (sometimes called "communes"), each with its own unique character and forms of self-government, which will be cooperatively linked through federation with other communities at several levels, from the municipal through the bioregional to the global.

Of course, it can (and has) been argued that people are just not interested in "politics." Further, some claim that this disinterest is why governments exist -- people delegate their responsibilities and power to others because they have better things to do. Anarchists, however, do not draw this conclusion from the current apathy that surrounds us. In fact, we argue that this apathy is not the cause of government but its result. Government is an inherently hierarchical system in which ordinary people are deliberately marginalised. The powerlessness people feel due to the workings of the system ensure that they are apathetic about it, thus guaranteeing that wealthy and powerful elites govern society without hindrance from the majority.

This result is not an accident, and the marginalisation of ordinary people is actually celebrated in "democratic" theory. As Noam Chomsky notes, *"Twentieth century democratic theorists advise that 'The public must be put in its place,' so that the 'responsible men' may 'live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd,' 'ignorant and meddling outsiders' whose 'function' is to be 'interested spectators of action,' not participants, lending their weight periodically to one or another of the leadership class (elections), then returning to their private concerns. (Walter Lippman). The great mass of the population, 'ignorant and mentally deficient,' must be kept in their place for the common good, fed with 'necessary illusion' and 'emotionally potent oversimplifications' (Wilson's Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Reinhold Niebuhr). Their 'conservative' counterparts are only more extreme in their adulation of the Wise Men who are the rightful rulers -- in the service of the rich and powerful, a minor footnote regularly forgotten"* [Year 501, p. 18]

As discussed in Section [B.2.6](#) (Who benefits from centralisation?) this marginalisation of the public from political life ensures that the wealthy can be "left alone" to use their power as they see fit. In other words, such marginalisation is a necessary part of a fully functioning capitalist society (as predicted by Thomas Jefferson, among others, when he said that *"The end of democracy and the defeat of the American Revolution will occur when the government falls into the hands of banking institutions and monied incorporations"*). Hence, under capitalism, libertarian social structures are to be discouraged. Or as Chomsky puts it, the *"rabble must be instructed in the values of subordination and a narrow quest for personal gain within the parameters set by the institutions of the masters; meaningful democracy, with popular association and action, is a threat to be overcome."* [Op. Cit., p. 18] This philosophy can be seen in the statement of a US Banker in Venezuela under the murderous Jimenez dictatorship: *"You have the freedom here to do whatever you want to do with your money, and to me, that is worth all the political freedom in the world."* [quoted by Chomsky, Op. Cit., p. 99]

Deterring libertarian alternatives to statism is a common feature of our current system. By marginalising and disempowering people, the ability of individuals to manage their own social activities is undermined and weakened. They develop a "fear of freedom" and embrace authoritarian institutions and "strong leaders," which in turn reinforces their marginalisation.

This consequence is hardly surprising. Anarchists maintain that the desire to participate and the ability to participate are in a symbiotic relationship: participation feeds on itself. By creating the social structures that

allow participation, participation will increase. As people increasingly take control of their lives, so their ability to do so also increases. The challenge of having to take responsibility for decisions that make a difference is at the same time an opportunity for personal development. To begin to feel power, having previously felt powerless, to win access to the resources required for effective participation and learn how to use them, is a liberating experience. Once people become active subjects, making things happen in one aspect of their lives, they are less likely to remain passive objects, allowing things to happen to them, in other aspects.

Hence a meaningful communal life based on self-empowered individuals is a distinct possibility. It is the hierarchical structures in statism and capitalism, marginalising and disempowering the majority, which is at the root of the current social apathy in the face of increasing social and ecological disruption. Libertarian socialists therefore call for a radically new form of political system to replace the centralized nation-state, a form that would be based around confederations of self-governing communities. In other words *"Society is a society of societies; a league of leagues of leagues; a commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths; a republic of republics of republics. Only there is freedom and order, only there is spirit, a spirit which is self-sufficiency and community, unity and independence."* [Gustav Landauer, **For Socialism**, pp. 125-126]

To create such a system would require dismantling the nation-state and reconstituting relations between communities on the basis of self-determination and free and equal confederation from below. In this following

subsections we will examine in more detail why this new system is needed and what it might look like. We will point out here that we are discussing the social structure of areas within which the inhabitants are predominately anarchists. It is obviously the case that areas in which the inhabitants are not anarchists will take on different forms depending upon the ideas that dominate there. Hence, assuming the end of the current state structure, we could see anarchist communities along with statist ones (capitalist or socialist) and these communities taking different forms depending on what their inhabitants want - communist to individualist communities in the case of anarchist ones, republican to private state organisations in the statist areas,, ones based on religious sects and so on. As it is up to non-anarchists to present their arguments in favour of their kind of statism, we will concentrate on discussing anarchist ideas on social organisation here.

I.5.1 WHAT ARE PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITIES AND WHY ARE THEY NEEDED?

As Murray Bookchin argues in **The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship**, the modern city is a virtual appendage of the capitalist workplace, being an outgrowth and essential counterpart of the factory (where "factory" means any enterprise in which surplus value is extracted from employees.) As such, cities are structured and administered primarily to serve the needs of the capitalist elite -- employers -- rather than the needs of the many -- their employees. From this standpoint, the city must be seen as (1) a transportation hub for importing raw materials and

exporting finished products; and (2) a huge dormitory for wage slaves, conveniently locating them near the enterprises where their labor is to be exploited, providing them with entertainment, clothing, medical facilities, etc. as well as coercive mechanisms for controlling their behavior.

The attitude behind the management of these "civic" functions by the bureaucratic servants of the capitalist ruling class is purely instrumental: worker-citizens are to be treated merely as means to corporate ends, not as ends in themselves. This attitude is reflected in the overwhelmingly alienating features of the modern city: its inhuman scale; the chilling impersonality of its institutions and functionaries; its sacrifice of health, comfort, pleasure, and aesthetic considerations to bottom-line requirements of efficiency and "cost effectiveness"; the lack of any real communal interaction among residents other than collective consumption of commodities and amusements; their consequent social isolation and tendency to escape into television, alcohol, drugs, gangs, etc. Such features make the modern metropolis the very antithesis of the genuine community for which most of its residents hunger. This contradiction at the heart of the system contains the possibility of radical social and political change.

The key to that change, from the anarchist standpoint, is the creation of a network of participatory communities based on self-government through direct, face-to-face democracy in grassroots neighbourhood and community assemblies. These assemblies will be general meetings open to all citizens in every neighbourhood, town, and village, and will be the source of and final authority over public policy for all levels of confederal coordination.

Such "town meetings" will bring ordinary people directly into the political process and give them an equal voice in the decisions that affect their lives - *"a people governing itself directly - when possible - without intermediaries, without masters."* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution** Vol 1, p. 210] Traditionally, these "town meetings" or participatory communities were called **communes** in anarchist theory.

As Kropotkin pointed out, a *"new form of political organisation has to be worked out the moment that socialistic principles shall enter our life. And it is self-evident that this new form will have to be **more popular, more decentralised, and nearer to the folk-mote self-government** than representative government can ever be."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 184] He, like all anarchists, considered the idea that socialism could be created by taking over the current state or creating a new one as doomed to failure. Instead, he recognised that socialism would only be built using new organisations that reflect the spirit of socialism (such as freedom, self-government and so on). Kropotkin, like Proudhon and Bakunin before him, therefore argued that *"[t]his was the form that the social revolution must take -- the independent commune. . .[whose] inhabitants have decided that they **will** communalize the consumption of commodities, their exchange and their production"* [Op. Cit., p. 163]

The size of the neighbourhood assemblies will vary, but it will probably fluctuate around some ideal size, discoverable in practice, that will provide a viable scale of face-to-face interaction and allow for both a variety of personal contacts and the opportunity to know and form a personal estimation of everyone in the neighborhood.

Some anarchists have suggested that the ideal size for a neighbourhood assembly might be around 300 to 600 adults, meeting in neighborhoods of 500 to 1,000 people. (See, for example, *"Green Political and Social Change"* by the Syracuse/Onandaga County Greens, in **Our Generation** magazine, vol. 24, No 2.). Such assemblies would meet regularly, perhaps monthly, and deal with a variety of issues. *"Neighborhoods of this size can support their assemblies to oversee the administration of elementary schools, child care centers, retail outlets for basic home supplies, solar based energy sources, community gardens, community handicraft and machine tool workshops, community laundries, and much more, all within close walking distance"* [Ibid].

Community assemblies and councils would be larger political units covering groups of neighborhoods involving perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 people. Like the neighborhood assemblies, they would be based on direct, "town-meeting"-style democracy. Most economies of scale are reached at this size:

"For example, assuming today's technology, division of labor, and level of workforce participation, a community of 10,000 with 2,000 manufacturing workers would be able to staff three plants of current average size in each of the thirteen basic manufacturing categories -- enough to supply the community with most of its manufacturing needs with considerable variety. Add multi-purpose machines, miniaturization, and cybernation, and the possibilities for a high degree of economic self-reliance become obvious. At this scale, the community still remains comprehensible, community control of the economy feasible, and such measures as distribution according to need and the regular rotation of people

through a full range of types of work and public administrative responsibilities can be easily introduced. Communities of 5,000 to 10,000 would combine community assemblies, meeting perhaps quarterly to decide on basic policy, with community councils consisting of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates from the neighborhood assemblies to oversee day to day coordination and administration of community policies" [Ibid]

I.5.2 WHY ARE CONFEDERATIONS OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITIES NEEDED?

Since not all issues are local, the neighbourhood and community assemblies will also elect mandated and recallable delegates to the larger-scale units of self-government in order to address issues affecting larger areas, such as urban districts, the municipality as a whole, the county, the bioregion, and ultimately the entire planet. Thus the assemblies will confederate at several levels in order to develop and coordinate common policies to deal with common problems.

This need for cooperation does not imply a centralised body. As Kropotkin pointed out, anarchists "*understand that if no central government was needed to rule the independent communes, if national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central **municipal** government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune.*" [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, pp. 163-164]

As in the economic federation of syndicates, the lower levels will control the higher, thus eliminating the current pre-emptive powers of centralised government hierarchies. Delegates to higher-level coordinating councils or conferences will be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the assemblies they represent, on how to deal with any issue. These instructions will be binding, committing delegates to a framework of policies within which they must act and providing for their recall and the nullification of their decisions if they fail to carry out their mandates. Delegates may be selected by election and/or sortition (random selection by lot, as for jury duty).

Most anarchists recognize that there will be a need for "public officials" with delegated "powers" within the social confederation. However, "powers" is not the best word to describe their activities, because their work is essentially administrative in nature -- for example, an individual may be elected to look into alternative power supplies for a community and report back on what he or she discovers. Or one may be elected to overlook the installation of a selected power supply. Because such a person is an elected delegate of the community, he or she is a "public official" in the broadest sense of the word, essentially an agent of the local community who is controlled by, and accountable to, that community.

Therefore, such "officials" are unlike politicians. This is for two reasons. Firstly, they cannot make policy decisions on behalf of those who elected them, and so they do not have governmental power over those who elected them. Taking the example of alternative power supplies, the elected "official" would present findings to the body by which he or she had been mandated. These

findings are **not** a law which the electors are required to follow, but a series of suggestions and information from which they chose what they think is best. By this method the "officials" remain the servants of the public and are not given power to make decisions for people. In addition, these "officials" will be rotated frequently to prevent a professionalization of politics and the problem of politicians being largely on their own once elected.

Therefore, such "public officials" would be under the strict control of the organisations that elected them to administration posts. But, as Kropotkin argued, the general assembly of the community *"in permanence - the forum always open - is the only way . . . to assure an honest and intelligent administration . . . [and is based upon] distrust of all executive powers."* [**The Great French Revolution** Vol.1, p. 211]

As Murray Bookchin argues, a *"confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policy making and the coordination and execution of adopted policies. Policy making is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas."* [*"The Meaning of Confederation"*, p. 48, **Society and Nature** No.3, pp. 41-54]

Thus the people will have the final word on policy, which is the essence of self-government, and each citizen will have his or her turn to participate in the coordination of public affairs. In other words, the "legislative branch" of self-government will be the people themselves organized in their community assemblies and their confederal coordinating councils, with the "executive branch" (public officials) limited to implementing policy formulated by the legislative branch, that is, by the people.

Besides rotation of public officials, means to ensure the accountability of such officials to the people will include a wider use of elections and sortitions, open access to proceedings and records of "executive" activities by computer or direct inspection, the right of citizen assemblies to mandate delegates to higher-level confederal meetings, recall their officials, and revoke their decisions, and the creation of accountability boards, elected or selected by lot (as for jury duty), for each important administrative branch, from local to national.

I.5.3 WHAT WILL BE THE SCALES AND LEVELS OF CONFEDERATION?

Virtually all the services and productive enterprises necessary to meet the needs of the population are present in today's small cities of 50,000 to 100,000. Beyond this size, diseconomies of scale begin to appear due to the complexities of coordinating urban services across wide areas and large populations. Therefore a libertarian-socialist society would probably form another level of confederation at the 50,000 to 100,000 range. Such units

of confederation would include urban districts within today's large cities, small cities, and rural districts composed of several nearby towns. At this size, economies of scale can be achieved for nearly all the remaining social needs such as universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions.

However, face-to-face meetings of the whole population are impractical at this size. Therefore, the legislative body at this level would be the **confederal council**, which would consist of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates from the neighborhood assemblies. These delegates would formulate policies to be discussed and voted on by the neighborhood assemblies, with the votes being summed across the district to determine district policy by majority rule.

To quote the Syracuse/Onandaga County Greens again, *"Since almost all of the economies of scale and public decisions necessary for social self-management can be achieved by the time we reach the 50,000 to 100,000 scale, larger levels of confederation can be oriented mainly around bioregional and cultural affinities and the few remaining but important economic resources that must be shared at these scales."* ["Green Political and Social Change", **Ibid**]

Ties between bioregions or larger territories based on the distribution of such things as geographically concentrated mineral deposits, climate dependent crops, and production facilities that are most efficient when concentrated in one area will unite communities confederally on the basis of common material needs as well as values. At the bioregional and higher levels of confederation, councils of mandated, recallable, and

rotating delegates will coordinate policies at those levels, but such policies will still be subject to approval by the neighborhood and community assemblies through their right to recall their representatives and revoke their decisions.

In the final analysis, libertarian socialism cannot function optimally -- and indeed may be fatally undermined -- unless the present system of competing nation-states is replaced by a cooperative system of decentralized bioregions of self-governing communities confederated on a global scale. For, if a libertarian-socialist nation is forced to compete in the global market for scarce raw materials and hard cash with which to buy them, the problems of "petty-bourgeois cooperativism," previously noted, will have merely been displaced to a higher level of organization. That is, instead of individual cooperatives acting as collective capitalists and competing against each other in the national market for profits, raw materials, etc., the nation **as a whole** will become the "collective capitalist" and compete against other nations in the global capitalist market -- a situation that is bound to reintroduce many problems, e.g. militarism, imperialism, and alienating/disempowering measures in the workplace, justified in the name of "efficiency" and "global competitiveness."

To some extent such problems can be reduced in the transition period by achieving self-sufficiency within bioregions (which should be easier in a libertarian-socialist economy where artificial needs are not manufactured by massive advertising campaigns of giant profit-seeking corporations) and by limiting interbioregional trade as much as possible to other members of the libertarian-socialist federation. However,

to eliminate the problem completely, anarchists envision a global council of bioregional delegates to coordinate global cooperation based on policies formulated and approved at the grassroots by the confederal principles outlined above.

I.5.4 HOW WILL ANYTHING EVER BE DECIDED BY ALL THOSE CONFEDERAL CONFERENCES?

Firstly, we doubt that a free society will spend all its time in assemblies or organising confederal conferences. As these congresses are concerned purely with joint activity and coordination, it is likely that they will not be called very often. Different associations and cooperatives have a functional need for cooperation and so would meet more regularly and take action on practical activity which affects a specific section of a community or group of communities. Not every issue that a member of a community is interested in is necessarily best discussed at a meeting of all members of a community or at a confederal conference.

In other words, communal assemblies and conferences will have specific, well defined agendas, and so there is little danger of "politics" taking up everyone's time. Hence, far from discussing abstract laws and pointless motions which no one actually knows much about, the issues discussed in these conferences will be on specific issues which are important to those involved. In addition, the standard procedure may be to elect a sub-group to investigate an issue and report back at a later stage with recommendations. The conference can change, accept, or reject any proposals. As Kropotkin argued, anarchy

would be based on *"free agreement, by exchange of letters and proposals, and by congresses at which delegates met to discuss well specified points, and to come to an agreement about them, but not to make laws. After the congress was over, the delegates [would return]. . .not with a law, but with the draft of a contract to be accepted or rejected"* [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 131]

By reducing conferences to functional bodies based on concrete issues, the problems of endless discussions can be reduced, if not totally eliminated. In addition, as functional groups would exist outside of these communal confederations (for example, industrial collectives would organise conferences about their industry with invited participants from consumer groups), there would be a limited agenda in most communal get-togethers.

The most important issues would be to agree on the guidelines for industrial activity, communal investment (e.g. houses, hospitals, etc.) and overall coordination of large scale communal activities. In this way everyone would be part of the commonwealth, deciding on how resources would be used to maximise human well-being and ecological survival. The problems associated with "the tyranny of small decisions" would be overcome without undermining individual freedom. (In fact, a healthy community would enrich and develop individuality by encouraging independent and critical thought, social interaction, and empowering social institutions based on self-management).

Is such a system fantasy? As Murray Bookchin points out, *"Paris in the late eighteenth century was, by the standards of that time, one of the largest and economically most complex cities in Europe: its*

*population approximated a million people. . . Yet in 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, the city was managed **institutionally** almost entirely by [48] citizen assemblies. . . and its affairs were coordinated by the **Commune**. . . and often, in fact, by the assemblies themselves, or sections as they were called, which established their own interconnections without recourse to the **Commune**."* [**Society and Nature**, issue no. 5, p. 96] Kropotkin argued that these "sections" (as they were called) showed *"the principles of anarchism, expressed some years later in England by W. Godwin, . . . had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution"* [**The Great French Revolution**, Vol. 1, p.204]

In other words, it **is** possible. It **has** worked. With the massive improvements in communication technology it is even more viable than before. Whether or not we reach such a self-managed society depends on whether we desire to be free or not.

I.5.5 AREN'T PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITIES AND CONFEDERATIONS JUST NEW STATES?

No. As we have seen in section [B.2](#), a state can be defined both by its structure and its function. As far as structure is concerned, a state involves the politico-military and economic domination of a certain geographical territory by a ruling elite, based on the delegation of power into the hands of the few, resulting in hierarchy (centralised authority). As Kropotkin argued, *"the word 'State' . . . should be reserved for those*

societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation." [Ethics, p. 317f]

In a system of federated participatory communities, however, there is no ruling elite, and thus no hierarchy, because power is retained by the lowest-level units of confederation through their use of direct democracy and mandated, rotating, and recallable delegates to meetings of higher-level confederal bodies. This eliminates the problem in "representative" democratic systems of the delegation of power leading to the elected officials becoming isolated from and beyond the control of the mass of people who elected them. As Kropotkin pointed out, an anarchist society would make decisions by *"means of congresses, composed of delegates, who discuss among themselves, and submit **proposals**, not **laws**, to their constituents"* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 135], and so is based on **self-government**, **not** representative government (i.e. statism).

In addition, in representative democracy, elected officials who must make decisions on a wide range of issues inevitably gather an unelected bureaucracy around them to aid in their decision making, and because of its control of information and its permanency, this bureaucracy soon has more power than the elected officials (who themselves have more power than the people). In the system we have sketched, policy proposals formulated by higher-level confederal bodies would often be presented to the grassroots political units for discussion and voting (though the grassroots units could also formulate policy proposals directly), and these higher-level bodies would often need to consult experts in formulating such proposals. But these experts would not be retained as a permanent bureaucracy, and all

information provided by them would be available to the lower-level units to aid in their decision making, thus eliminating the control of information on which bureaucratic power is based.

Perhaps it will be objected that communal decision making is just a form of "statism" based on direct, as opposed to representative, democracy -- "statist" because the individual is still be subject to the rules of the majority and so is not free. This objection, however, confuses statism with free agreement (i.e. cooperation). Since participatory communities, like productive syndicates, are voluntary associations, the decisions they make are based on self-assumed obligations (see section [A.2.11](#) - Why are anarchists in favour of direct democracy?), and dissenters can leave the association if they so desire.

In addition, in a free society, dissent and direct action can be used by minorities to press their case (or defend their freedom) as well as debate. As Carole Pateman argues, *"Political disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based."* In this way, individual liberty can be protected in a communal system and society enriched by opposition, confrontation and dissent. Without self-management and minority dissent, society would become *"an ideological cemetery"* which would *"stifle the dialectic of ideas that thrives"* on discussion, and we may had, stifle the development of the individuals within that society. [Bookchin, *"Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism"*, **Democracy and Nature** no. 8, p.9] Therefore it is likely that a society based on voluntary agreements and self-management would, out of

interpersonal empathy and self-interest, create a society that encouraged individuality and respect for minorities.

Therefore, a commune's participatory nature is the opposite of statism. April Carter, in **Authority and Democracy** agrees. She states that "*commitment to direct democracy or anarchy in the socio-political sphere is incompatible with political authority*" [p. 69] and that the "*only authority that can exist in a direct democracy is the collective 'authority' vested in the body politic . . . it is doubtful if authority can be created by a group of equals who reach decisions by a process of mutual persuasion.*" [p. 380]

Anarchists assert that individuals and the institutions they create cannot be considered in isolation. Authoritarian institutions will create individuals who have a servile nature, who cannot govern themselves. Anarchists, therefore, consider it commonsense that individuals, in order to be free, **must** have take part in determining the general agreements they ` make with their neighbours which give form to their communities. Otherwise, society itself could not exist and individual's would be subject to rules others make **for** them (following orders is hardly libertarian). Therefore, anarchists recognise the social nature of humanity and the fact any society based on contracts (like capitalism) will be marked by authority, injustice and inequality, **not** freedom. As Bookchin points out, "*To speak of 'The Individual' part from its social roots is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions.*" [Op. Cit., p. 15]

Society cannot be avoided and "*[u]nless everyone is to be psychologically homogeneous and society's interests*

so uniform in character that dissent is simply meaningless, there must be room for conflicting proposals, discussion, rational explication and majority decisions - in short, democracy." [Op. Cit, pp. 15-16] Those who reject democracy in the name of liberty (such as many supporters of capitalism) usually also see the need for laws and hierarchical authority (particularly in the workplace). This is unsurprising, as such authority is the only means left by which collective activity can be coordinated if "democracy" is rejected (usually as "statist", which is ironic as the resulting institutions, such as a capitalist company, are far more statist than directly democratic ones).

However, it should be noted that communities can expel individuals or groups of individuals who constantly hinder community decisions. As Malatesta argued, *"for if it is unjust that the majority should oppress the minority, the contrary would be quite as unjust; and if the minority has a right to rebel, the majority has a right to defend itself. . . it is true that this solution is not completely satisfactory. The individuals put out of the association would be deprived of many social advantages, which an isolated person or group must do without, because they can only be procured by the cooperation of a great number of human beings. But what would you have? These malcontents cannot fairly demand that the wishes of many others should be sacrificed for their sakes."* [**A Talk about Anarchist-Communism**, p. 29]

Nevertheless, such occurrences would be rare (for reasons discussed in section [1.5.6](#)), and their possibility merely indicates that free association also means the freedom **not** to associate. This a very important freedom for both the majority and the minority, and must be

defended. However, as an isolated life is impossible, the need for communal associations is essential. It is only by living together in a supportive community can individuality be encouraged and developed along with individual freedom.

Lastly, that these communities and confederations are not just states with new names is indicated by two more considerations. Firstly, in regard to the activities of the confederal conferences, it is clear that they would **not** be passing laws on personal behaviour or ethics, i.e. not legislating to restrict the liberty of those who live in these communities they represent. For example, a community is unlikely to pass laws outlawing homosexuality or censoring the press, for reasons discussed in the [next section](#). Hence they would not be "law-making bodies" in the modern sense of the term, and thus not statist. Secondly, these confederations have no means to enforce their decisions. In other words, if a confederal congress makes a decision, it has no means to force people to act or not act in a certain way. We can imagine that there will be ethical reasons why participants will not act in ways to oppose joint activity - as they took part in the decision making process they would be considered childish if they reject the final decision because it did not go in their favour.

So, far from being new states by which one section of a community imposes its ethical standards on another, the anarchist commune is just a public forum. In this forum, issues of community interest (for example, management of the commons, control of communalised economic activity, and so forth) are discussed and policy agreed upon. In addition, interests beyond a local area are also discussed and delegates for confederal conferences are

mandated with the wishes of the community. Hence, administration of things replaces government of people, with the community of communities existing to ensure that the interests of all are managed by all and that liberty, justice and equality are more than just ideals.

For these reasons, a libertarian-socialist society would not create a new state as far as structure goes. But what about in the area of function? As noted in section [B.2.1](#), the function of the state is to enable the ruling elite to exploit subordinate social strata, i.e. to derive an economic surplus from them, which it does by protecting certain economic monopolies from which the elite derives its wealth, and so its power. But this function is completely eliminated by the economic structure of anarchist society, which, by abolishing private property, makes it impossible for a privileged elite to form, let alone exploit "subordinate strata" (which will not exist, as no one is subordinate in power to anyone else). In other words, by placing the control of productive resources in the hands of the workers councils and community assemblies, every worker is given free access to the means of production that he or she needs to earn a living. Hence no one will be forced to pay usury (i.e. a use-fee) in the form of appropriated surplus value (profits) to an elite class that monopolizes the means of production. In short, without private property, the state loses its reason for existence.

I.5.6 WON'T THERE BE A DANGER OF A "TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY" UNDER LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM?

There is, of course, this danger in **any** system of democracy, direct or indirect. However, while there is cause for concern (and anarchists are at the forefront in expressing it), the "tyranny-of-the-majority" objection fails to take note of the vast difference between direct and "representative" forms of democracy.

In the current system, as we pointed out in section B.5, voters are mere passive spectators of occasional, staged, and highly rehearsed debates among candidates preselected by the corporate elite, who pay for campaign expenses. More often the public is expected to choose simply on the basis of political ads and news sound bites. Moreover, once the choice is made, cumbersome and ineffective recall procedures insure that elected representatives can act more or less as they (or rather, their wealthy sponsors) please. The function, then, of the electorate in bourgeois "representative government" is ratification of "choices" that have been **already made for them!**

By contrast, in a direct, libertarian democracy, decisions are made following public discussion in community assemblies open to all. After decisions have been reached, outvoted minorities -- even minorities of one -- still have ample opportunity to present reasoned and persuasive counterarguments to try to change the decision. This process of debate, disagreement, challenge, and counter-challenge, which goes on even after the defeated minority has temporarily acquiesced in the decision of the majority, is virtually absent in the representative system, where "tyranny of the majority" is

truly a problem. In addition, minorities can secede from an association if the decision reached by it are truly offensive to them.

And let's not forget that in all likelihood, issues of personal conduct or activity will not be discussed in the neighbourhood assemblies. Why? Because we are talking about a society in which most people consider themselves to be unique, free individuals, who would thus recognise and act to protect the uniqueness and freedom of others. Unless people are indoctrinated by religion or some other form of ideology, they can be tolerant of others and their individuality. If this is not the case now, it has to do with the existence of authoritarian social relationships and the type of person they create -- relationships that will be dismantled under libertarian socialism.

Today an authoritarian worldview, characterized by an inability to think beyond the categories of domination and submission, is imparted by conditioning in the family, schools, religious institutions, clubs, fraternities, the army, etc., and produces a type of personality that is intolerant of any individual or group perceived as threatening to the perpetuation of that worldview and its corresponding institutions and values. Thus, as Bakunin argues, "public opinion" is potentially intolerant *"simply because hitherto this power has not been humanized itself; it has not been humanized because the social life of which it is ever the faithful expression is based. . . in the worship of divinity, not on respect for humanity; in authority, not on liberty; on privilege, not on equality; in the exploitation, not on the brotherhood, of men; on iniquity and falsehood, not on justice and truth. Consequently its real action, always in contradiction of*

the humanitarian theories which it professes, has constantly exercised a disastrous and depraving influence" [God and the State, p. 43ff].

In an anarchist society, however, a conscious effort will be made to dissolve the institutional and traditional sources of the authoritarian/submissive type of personality, and thus to free "public opinion" of its current potential for intolerance. In addition, it should be noted that as anarchists recognise that the practice of self-assumed political obligation implied in free association also implies the right to practice dissent and disobedience as well. As Carole Pateman notes, "*[e]ven if it is impossible to be unjust to myself, I do not vote for myself alone, but alone with everyone else. Questions about injustice are always appropriate in political life, for there is no guarantee that participatory voting will actually result in decisions in accord with the principles of political morality.*" [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 160]

If an individual or group of individuals feel that a specific decision threatens their freedom (which is the basic principle of political morality in an anarchist society) they can (and must) act to defend that freedom. "*The political practice of participatory voting rests in a collective self-consciousness about the meaning and implication of citizenship. The members of the political association understand that to vote is simultaneously to commit oneself, to commit one's fellow citizens, and also to commit oneself to them in a mutual undertaking . . . a refusal to vote on a particular occasion indicates that the refusers believe . . . [that] the proposal . . . infringes the principle of political morality on which the political association is based . . . A refusal to vote [or the use of*

direct action] could be seen as an appeal to the 'sense of justice' of their fellow citizens." [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

As they no longer "consent" to the decisions made by their community they can appeal to the "sense of justice" of their fellow citizens by direct action and indicate that a given decision may have impacts which the majority were not aware. Hence direct action and dissent is a key aspect of an anarchist society and help ensure against the tyranny of the majority. Anarchism rejects the "love it or leave it" attitude that marks classical liberalism as well as Rousseau (this aspect of his work being inconsistent with its foundations in participation).

It should be stressed, however, that most anarchists do not think that the way to guard against tyranny by the majority is to resort to decision-making by consensus (where no action can be taken until every person in the group agrees) or a property system (based in contracts). Both consensus (see section [A.2.12](#) - Is consensus an alternative to direct democracy?) and contracts (see section [A.2.14](#) - Why is voluntarism not enough?) soon result in authoritarian social relationships developing in the name of "liberty."

For example, decision making by consensus tends to eliminate the creative role of dissent and mutate into a system that pressures people into psychic and intellectual conformity -- hardly a libertarian ideal. In the case of property- and contract-based systems, those with property have more power than those without, and so they soon determine what can and cannot be done -- in other words, the "tyranny of the minority" and hierarchical authority. Both alternatives are deeply

flawed. Hence most anarchists have recognized that majority decision making, though not perfect, is the best way to reach decisions in a political system based on maximising freedom. Direct democracy in grassroots confederal assemblies and workers' councils ensures that decision making is "horizontal" in nature (i.e. between **equals**) and not hierarchical (i.e. governmental, between order giver and order taker).

I.5.7 WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO JOIN A COMMUNE?

As would be expected, no one would be **forced** to join a commune nor take part in its assemblies. To suggest otherwise would be contrary to anarchist principles. We have already indicated why the communes would not be likely to restrict individuals with new "laws". However, what about individuals who live within the boundaries of a commune (obviously individuals can leave to find communities more in line with their own concepts of right and wrong if they cannot convince their neighbours of the validity of their ideas)? For example, a local neighbourhood may include households that desire to associate and a few that do not. Are the communal decisions binding on non-members? Obviously not. If an individual or family desire **not** to join (for whatever reason), their freedoms must be respected. However, this also means that they cannot benefit from communal activity and resources (such a free housing, hospitals, and so forth) and, possibly, have to pay for their use. As long as they do not exploit or oppress others, an anarchist community would respect their decision.

However, many who oppose anarchist direct democracy in the name of freedom often do so because they desire to oppress and exploit others. In other words, they oppose participatory communities because they (rightly) fear that this would restrict their ability to oppress, exploit and grow rich off the labour of others. This type of opposition can be seen from history, when rich elites, in the name of liberty, have replaced democratic forms of social decision making with representative or authoritarian ones (see section [B.2.6](#)). Regardless of what defenders of capitalism claim, "voluntary bilateral exchanges" affect third parties and can harm others indirectly. This can easily be seen from examples like concentrations of wealth which have effects across society, or crime in the local community, or the ecological impacts of consumption and production.

As a way to minimize this problem, an anarchist revolution aims to place social wealth (starting with the land) in the hands of all and to protect only those uses of it which are considered just by society as a whole. In other words, by recognising that "property" is a product of society, an anarchist society will ensure that an individual's "property" is protected by his or her fellows when it is based purely upon actual occupancy and use. As Malatesta put it, some *"seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas."* [**Anarchy**, p. 41]

So, it goes without saying that the minority, as in any society, will exist within the ethical norms of society and

they will be "forced to adhere" to them in the same sense that they are "forced to adhere" not to murder people. Few people would say that forcing people not to commit murder is a restriction of their liberty. Therefore, while allowing the maximum of individual freedom of dissent, an anarchist community would still have to apply its ethical standards to those beyond that community. Individuals would not be allowed to murder or enslave others and claim that they are allowed to do so because they are not part of the local community (see section [1.5.8](#) on crime in an anarchist society). Similarly, individuals would not be allowed to develop private property (as opposed to possession) simply because they wanted to. Such a "ban" on private property would not be a restriction on liberty simply because stopping the development of authority hardly counts as an authoritarian act (for an analogy, supporters of capitalism do not think that banning theft is a restriction of liberty and because this view is - currently - accepted by the majority, it is enforced it on the minority). Even the word "ban" is wrong, as it is the would-be capitalist who is trying to ban freedom for others from their "property." Members of a free society would simply refuse to recognise the claims of private property - "*occupancy and use*" (to use Tucker's term) would be the limits of possession - and so property would become "*that control of a thing by a person which will receive either social sanction, or else unanimous individual sanction, when the laws of social expediency shall have been fully discovered.*" [B. Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 131]

Therefore anarchists support the maximum of experimentations while ensuring that the social conditions that allow this experimentation are protected

against concentrations of wealth and power. As Malatesta put it, "*Anarchism involves all and only those forms of life that respect liberty and recognise that every person has an equal right to enjoy the good things of nature and the products of their own activity.*" [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 14] This means that Anarchists do not support the liberty of being a boss (anarchists will happily work **with** someone but not **for** someone). Of course, those who desire to create private property against the wishes of others expect those others to respect their wishes. So, when the would-be proprietarians happily fence off their "property" and exclude others from it, could not these others remember these words from Woody Guthrie's **This Land is Your Land**, and act accordingly?

*"As I went rumbling that dusty highway
I saw a sign that said private property
But on the other side it didn't say nothing
This land was made for you and me"*

While happy to exclude others from "their" property, such owners seem more than happy to use the resources held in common by others. They are the ultimate "free riders," desiring the benefits of society but rejecting the responsibilities that go with it. In the end, such "individualists" usually end up supporting the state (an institution they claim to hate) precisely because its the only means by which private property and their "freedom" to exercise authority can be defended .

Therefore, individuals are free not to associate, but their claims of "ownership" will be based around **use** rights, not property rights. Individual's will be protected by their fellows only in so far as what they claim to "own" is

related to their ability to use said "property." Without a state to back up and protect property "rights," we see that all rights are, in the end, what society considers to be fair (the difference between law and social custom is discussed in section [1.7.3](#)). What the state does is to impose "rights" which do not have such a basis (i.e. those that protect the property of the elite) or "rights" which have been corrupted by wealth and would have been changed because of this corruption had society been free to manage its own affairs.

In summary, individuals will be free not to join a participatory community, and hence free to place themselves outside its decisions and activities on most issues that do not apply to the fundamental ethical standards of a society. Hence individuals who desire to live outside of anarchist communities would be free to live as they see fit but would not be able to commit murder, rape, create private property or other activities that harmed individuals. It should be noted, moreover, that this does not mean that their possessions will be taken from them by "society" or that "society" will tell them what to do with their possessions. Freedom, in a complex world, means that such individuals will not be in a position to turn their possessions into **property** and thus recreate capitalism. (For the distinction between "property" and "possessions," see B.3.1.) This will not be done by "anarchist police" or by "banning" voluntary agreements, but purely by recognising that "property" is a social creation and by creating a social system that will encourage individuals to stand up for their rights and cooperate with each other.

I.5.8 WHAT ABOUT CRIME?

For anarchists, "crime" can best be described as anti-social acts, or behavior which harms someone else or which invades their personal space. Anarchists argue that the root cause for crime is not some perversity of human nature or "original sin," but is due to the type of society by which people are moulded. For example, anarchists point out that by eliminating private property, crime could be reduced by about 90 percent, since about 90 percent of crime is currently motivated by evils stemming from private property such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and alienation. Moreover, by adopting anarchist methods of non-authoritarian child rearing and education, most of the remaining crimes could also be eliminated, because they are largely due to the anti-social, perverse, and cruel "secondary drives" that develop because of authoritarian, pleasure-negative child-rearing practices (See section [J.6](#) - What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?)

"Crime", therefore, cannot be divorced from the society within which it occurs. Society, if you like, gets the criminals it deserves. For example, anarchists do not think it unusual nor unexpected that crime exploded under the pro-free market capitalist regimes of Thatcher and Reagan. Crime, the most obvious symptom of social crisis, took 30 years to double in Britain (from 1 million incidents in 1950 to 2.2 million in 1979. However, between 1979 and 1992 the crime rate more than doubled, exceeding the 5 million mark in 1992. These 13 years were marked by a government firmly committed to the "free market" and "individual responsibility." It was entirely predictable that the social disruption, atomisation of individuals, and increased poverty caused

by freeing capitalism from social controls would rip society apart and increase criminal activity. Unsurprisingly (from an anarchist viewpoint), under these pro-market governments we also saw a reduction in civil liberties, increased state centralisation, and the destruction of local government. As Malatesta put it, the classical liberalism which these governments represented could have had no other effect, for *"the government's powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality"* [Anarchy, p. 46]

Hence the paradox of governments committed to "individual rights," the "free market" and "getting the state off our backs" increasing state power and reducing rights while holding office during a crime explosion is no paradox at all. *"The conjuncture of the rhetoric of individual freedom and a vast increase in state power,"* argues Carole Pateman, *"is not unexpected at a time when the influence of contract doctrine is extending into the last, most intimate nooks and crannies of social life. Taken to a conclusion, contract undermines the conditions of its own existence. Hobbes showed long ago that contract - all the way down - requires absolutism and the sword to keep war at bay."* [The Sexual Contract, p. 232]

Capitalism, and the contract theory on which it is built, will inevitably rip apart society. Capitalism is based upon a vision of humanity as isolated individuals with no connection other than that of money and contract. Such a vision cannot help but institutionalise anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued *"it is not love and not even sympathy upon which society is based in [humanity]. It is the conscience - be it only at the stage of an instinct - of*

human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of . . . the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to [one's] own." [**Mutual Aid**, p. xiv]

The social atomisation required and created by capitalism destroys the basic bonds of society - namely human solidarity - and hierarchy crushes the individuality required to understand that we share a common humanity with others and so understand **why** we must be ethical and respect others rights.

We should also point out that prisons have numerous negative affects on society as well as often re-inforcing criminal (i.e. anti-social) behaviour. Kropotkin originated the accurate description of prisons as "*Universities of Crime*" wherein the first-time criminal learns new techniques and have adapt to the prevailing ethical standards within them. Hence, prisons would have the effect of increasing the criminal tendencies of those sent there and so prove to be counter-productive. In addition, prisons do not affect the social conditions which promote many forms of crime.

We are not saying, however, that anarchists reject the concept of individual responsibility. While recognising that rape, for example, is the result of a social system which represses sexuality and is based on patriarchy (i.e. rape has more to do with power than sex), anarchists do not "sit back" and say "it's society's fault." Individuals have to take responsibility for their own actions and recognise that consequences of those actions. Part of the current problem with "law codes" is that individuals have

been deprived of the responsibility for developing their own ethical code, and so are less likely to develop "civilised" social standards (see section [1.7.3](#)).

Therefore, while anarchists reject the ideas of law and a specialised justice system, they are not blind to the fact that anti-social action may not totally disappear in a free society. Therefore, some sort of "court" system would still be necessary to deal with the remaining crimes and to adjudicate disputes between citizens.

These courts would function on two levels. Firstly, if the parties involved could agree to hand their case to a third party, then the "court" in question would be the arrangements made by those parties. Secondly, if the parties could not agree (or if the victim was dead), the issue could be raised at a communal assembly and a "court" appointed to look into the issue. These "courts" would be independent from the commune, their independence strengthened by popular election instead of executive appointment of judges, by protecting the jury system of selection of random citizens by lot, and by informing jurors of their right to judge the law itself, according to their conscience, as well as the facts of a case. As Malatesta pointed out, *"when differences were to arise between men [sic!], would not arbitration voluntarily accepted, or pressure of public opinion, be perhaps more likely to establish where the right lies than through an irresponsible magistrature which has the right to adjudicate on everything and everybody and is inevitably incompetent and therefore unjust?"* [**Anarchy**, p. 43]

In the case of a "police force," this would not exist as either a public or private specialised body or company. If

a local community did consider that public safety required a body of people who could be called upon for help, we imagine that a new system would be created. This system would be based around a voluntary militia system, in which all members of the community could serve if they so desired. Those who served would not constitute a professional body; instead the service would be made up of local people who would join for short periods of time and be replaced if they abused their position. Hence the likelihood that a communal militia would become corrupted by power, like the current police force or a private security firm exercising a policing function, would be vastly reduced.

Such a body would not have a monopoly on protecting others, but would simply be on call if others required it. It would no more be a "police force" than the current fire service is a police force (individuals are not banned from putting out fires today because the fire service exists, similarly individuals will be free to help stop anti-social crime by themselves in an anarchist society).

Of course there are anti-social acts which occur without witnesses and so the "guilty" party cannot be readily identified. If such acts did occur we can imagine an anarchist community taking two courses of action. The injured party may look into the facts themselves or appoint an agent to do so or, more likely, an ad hoc group would be elected at a community assembly to investigate specific crimes of this sort. Such a group would be given the necessary "authority" to investigate the crime and be subject to recall by the community if they start trying to abuse whatever authority they had. Once the investigating body thought it had enough evidence it would inform the community as well as the

affected parties and then organise a court. Of course, a free society will produce different solutions to such problems, solutions no-one has considered yet and so these suggestions are just that, suggestions.

As is often stated, prevention is better than cure. This is as true of crime as of disease. In other words, crime is best fought by rooting out its **causes** as opposed to punishing those who act in response to these causes. For example, its hardly surprising that a culture that promotes individual profit and consumerism would produce individuals who do not respect other people (or themselves) and see them as purely means to an end (usually increased consumption). And, like everything else in a capitalist system, such as honour and pride, conscience is also available at the right price -- hardly an environment which encourages consideration for others, or even for oneself.

In addition, a society based on hierarchical authority will also tend to produce anti-social activity because the free development and expression it suppresses. Thus, irrational authority (which is often claimed to be the only cure for crime) actually helps produce it. As Emma Goldman argued, *"Crime is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social, moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws on the statues can only increase, but never do away with, crime"* [Red Emma Speaks, p. 57]

Eric Fromm, decades latter, makes the same point:

*"It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire but to the thwarting of the whole of life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man's sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. . .the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually interdependent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realised, the less is the strength of destructiveness. **Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life.** Those individual and social conditions that make for suppression of life produce the passion for destruction that forms, so to speak, the reservoir from which particular hostile tendencies -- either against others or against oneself -- are nourished" [The Fear of Freedom, p. 158]*

Therefore, by reorganising society so that it empowers everyone and actively encourages the use of all our intellectual, emotional and sensuous abilities, crime would soon cease to be the huge problem that it is now. As for the anti-social behavior or clashes between individuals that might still exist in such a society, it would be dealt with in a system based on respect for the individual and a recognition of the social roots of the problem. Restraint would be kept to a minimum.

Anarchists think that public opinion and social pressure would be the main means of preventing anti-social acts in an anarchist society, with such actions as boycotting

and ostracising used as powerful sanctions to convince those attempting them of the errors of their way. Extensive non-cooperation by neighbours, friends and workmates would be the best means of stopping acts which harmed others.

An anarchist system of justice, we should note, would have a lot to learn from aboriginal societies simply because they are examples of social order without the state. Indeed many of the ideas we consider as essential to justice today can be found in such societies. As Kropotkin argued, *"when we imagine that we have made great advances in introducing, for instance, the jury, all we have done is to return to the institutions of the so-called 'barbarians' after having changed it to the advantage of the ruling classes"* [**The State - Its Historic Role**, p. 18]

Like aboriginal justice (as documented by Rupert Ross in **Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice**) anarchists contend that offenders should not be punished but justice achieved by the teaching and healing of all involved. Public condemnation of the wrong doing would be a key aspect of this process, but the wrong doer would remain part of the community and so the effects of their actions on others in terms of grief and pain caused. It would be likely that wrong doers would be expected to try to make amends for their act by community service or helping victims and their families.

So, from a practical viewpoint, almost all anarchists oppose prisons on both practical grounds (they do not work) and ethical grounds (*"We know what prisons mean - they mean broken down body and spirit, degradation, consumption, insanity"* Voltairine de Cleyre, quoted by

Paul Avrich in **An American Anarchist**, p. 146]). The Makhnovists took the usual anarchist position on prisons:

"Prisons are the symbol of the servitude of the people, they are always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants. . . Free people have no use for prisons. Wherever prisons exist, the people are not free. . . In keeping with this attitude, they [the Makhnovists] demolished prisons wherever they went." [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153]

With the exception of Benjamin Tucker, no major anarchist writer supported the institution. Few anarchists think that private prisons (like private policemen) are compatible with their notions of freedom. All anarchists are against the current "justice" system which seems to them to be organised around **revenge** and punishing effects and not fixing causes.

However, there are psychopaths and other people in any society who are too dangerous to be allowed to walk freely. Restraint in this case would be the only option and such people may have to be isolated from others for their own, and others, safety. Perhaps mental hospitals would be used, or an area quarantined for their use created (perhaps an island, for example). However, such cases (we hope) would be rare.

So instead of prisons and a legal code based on the concept of punishment and revenge, anarchists support the use of public opinion and pressure to stop anti-social acts and the need to therapeutically rehabilitate those who commit anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued, *"liberty,*

*equality, and practical human sympathy are the most effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instinct of certain among us" and **not** a parasitic legal system. [The Anarchist Reader, p. 117]*

I.5.9 WHAT ABOUT FREEDOM OF SPEECH UNDER ANARCHISM?

Many express the idea that **all** forms of socialism would endanger freedom of speech, press, and so forth. The usual formulation of this argument is in relation to state socialism and goes as follows: if the state (or "society") owned all the means of communication, then only the views which the government supported would get access to the media.

This is an important point and it needs to be addressed. However, before doing so, we should point out that under capitalism the major media are effectively controlled by the wealthy. As we argued in section [D.3](#), the media are **not** the independent defenders of freedom that they like to portray themselves as. This is hardly surprising, since newspapers, television companies, and so forth are capitalist enterprises owned by the wealthy and with managing directors and editors who are also wealthy individuals with a vested interest in the status quo. Hence there are institutional factors which ensure that the "free press" reflects the interests of capitalist elites.

However, in democratic capitalist states there is little overt censorship. Radical and independent publishers can still print their papers and books without state

intervention (although market forces ensure that this activity can be difficult and financially unrewarding). Under socialism, it is argued, because "society" owns the means of communication and production, this liberty will not exist. Instead, as can be seen from all examples of "actually existing socialism," such liberty is crushed in favour of the government's point of view.

As anarchism rejects the state, we can say that this danger does not exist under libertarian socialism. However, since social anarchists argue for the communalisation of production, could not restrictions on free speech still exist? We argue no, for two reasons. Firstly, publishing houses, radio stations, and so on will be run by their workers, directly. They will be supplied by other cooperatives, with whom they will make agreements, and **not** by "central planning" officials, who would not exist. In other words, there is no bureaucracy of officials allocating (and so controlling) resources (and so the means of communication). Hence, anarcho-syndicalist self-management will ensure that there is a wide range of opinions in different magazines and papers. There would be community papers, radio stations, etc., and obviously they would play an increased role in a free society. But they would not be the only media. Associations, political parties, syndicates, and so on would have their own media and/or would have access to the resources of communication workers' syndicates, so ensuring that a wide range of opinions can be expressed.

Secondly, the "ultimate" power in a free society will be the individuals of which it is composed. This power will be expressed in communal and workplace assemblies that can recall delegates and revoke their decisions. It is

doubtful that these assemblies would tolerate a set of would-be bureaucrats determining what they can or cannot read, see, or hear. In addition, individuals in a free society would be interesting in hearing different viewpoints and discussing them. This is the natural side-effect of critical thought (which self-management would encourage), and so they would have a vested interest in defending the widest possible access to different forms of media for different views. Having no vested interests to defend, a free society would hardly encourage or tolerate the censorship associated with the capitalist media (*"I listen to criticism because I am **greedy**. I listen to criticism because I am **selfish**. I would not deny myself another's insights."*) [**The Right to be Greedy**]

Therefore, anarchism will **increase** freedom of speech in many important ways, particularly in the workplace (where it is currently denied under capitalism). This will be a natural result of a society based on maximising freedom and the desire to enjoy life.

We would also like to point out that during both the Spanish and Russian revolutions, freedom of speech was protected within anarchist areas.

For example, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine *"fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the Press, and of political association. In all the cities and towns occupied . . . [c]omplete freedom of speech, Press, assembly, and association of any kind and for everyone was immediately proclaimed."* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153] This is confirmed by Micheal Malet, who notes that *"[o]ne of the most remarkable achievements of the Makhnovists*

was to perserve a freedom of speach more extensive than any of their opponents." [**Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War**, p. 175]

In revolutionary Spain republicians, liberals, communists, trotskyites and many different anarchist groups all had freedom to express their views. Emma Goldman writes that "*[o]n my first visit to Spain in September 1936, nothing surprised me so much as the amount of political freedom I found everywhere. True, it did not extend to Fascists . . . [but] everyone of the anti-Fascist front enjoyed political freedom which hardly existed in any of the so-called European democracies.*" [**Vision on Fire**, David Porter (ed), p.147] This is confirmed in a host of other eye-witnesses, including George Orwell in **Homage to Catalonia** (in fact, it was the rise of the pro-capitalist republicans and communists that introduced censorship).

Both movements were fighting a life-and-death struggle against fascist and pro-capitalist armies and so this defense of freedom of expression, given the circumstances, is particularly noteworthy.

Therefore, based upon both theory and practice we can say that anarchism will not endanger freedom of expression.

I.5.10 WHAT ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES?

Political parties and other interest groups will exist in an anarchist society as long as people feel the need to join them. They will not be "banned" in any way, and their

members will have the same rights as everyone else. Individuals who are members of political parties or associations can take part in communal and other assemblies and try to convince others of the soundness of their ideas.

However, there is a key difference between such activity and politics under a capitalist democracy. This is that elections to positions of responsibility in an anarchist society will not be based on party tickets. In other words, when individuals are elected to administrative posts they are elected to carry out their mandate, **not** to carry out their party's programme. Of course, if the individuals in question had convinced their fellow workers and citizens that their programme was correct, then this mandate and the programme would be identical. However this is unlikely in practice. We would imagine that the decisions of collectives and communes would reflect the complex social interactions and diverse political opinions their members and of the various groupings within the association.

Hence anarchism will likely contain many different political groupings and ideas. The relative influence of these within collectives and communes would reflect the strength of their arguments and the relevance of their ideas, as would be expected in a free society. As Bakunin argued, *"The abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we vindicate the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official"* [quoted by Malatesta in **Anarchy**]

It is only when representative government replaces self-management that political debate results in "elected dictatorship" and centralisation of power into the hands of one party which claims to speak for the whole of society, as if the latter had one mind.

I.5.11 WHAT ABOUT INTEREST GROUPS AND OTHER ASSOCIATIONS?

Anarchists do not think that social life can be reduced to political and economic associations alone. Individuals have many different interests and desires which they must express in order to have a truly free and interesting life. Therefore an anarchist society will see the development of numerous voluntary associations and groups to express these interests. For example, there would be consumer groups, musical groups, scientific associations, art associations, clubs, housing cooperatives and associations, craft and hobby guilds, fan clubs, animal rights associations, groups based around sex, sexuality, creed and colour and so forth. Associations will be created for all human interests and activities. As Kropotkin argued:

"He who wishes for a grand piano will enter the association of musical instrument makers. And by giving the association part of his half-days' leisure, he will soon possess the piano of his dreams. If he is fond of astronomical studies he will join the association of astronomers. . . and he will have the telescope he desires by taking his share of the associated work. . . In short, the five or seven hours a day which each will have at his disposal, after having consecrated several hours to the

production of necessities, would amply suffice to satisfy all longings for luxury, however varied. Thousands of associations would undertake to supply them." [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 120]

We can imagine, therefore, an anarchist society being based around associations and interest groups on every subject which fires the imagination of individuals and for which individuals want to meet in order to express and further their interests. Housing associations, for example, would exist to allow inhabitants to manage their local areas, design and maintain their homes and local parks and gardens. Animal rights and other interest groups would produce information on issues they consider important, trying to convince others of the errors of eating meat or whatever. Consumer groups would be in dialogue with syndicates about improving products and services, ensuring that syndicates produce what is required by consumers. Environment groups would exist to watch production and make sure that it is not creating damaging side effects and informing both syndicates and communes of their findings. Feminist, homosexual, bisexual and anti-racist groups would exist to put their ideas across, highlighting areas in which social hierarchies and prejudice still existed. All across society, people would be associating together to express themselves and convince others of their ideas on many different issues.

Hence in a anarchist society, free association would take on a stronger and more positive role than under capitalism. In this way, social life would take on many dimensions, and the individual would have the choice of thousands of societies to join to meet his or her interests or create new ones with other like-minded people.

Anarchists would be the last to deny that there is more to life than work!

I.6 WHAT ABOUT THE "TRAGEDY OF THE
COMMONS"? SURELY COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP
WILL LEAD TO OVERUSE AND
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION?

It should first be noted that the paradox of the *"Tragedy of the Commons"* is actually an application of the *"tragedy of the free-for-all"* to the issue of the *"commons"* (communally owned land). Resources that are "free for all" have all the problems associated with what is called the "Tragedy of the Commons," namely the overuse and destruction of such resources; but unfortunately for the capitalists who refer to such examples, they do not involve true "commons."

The "free-for-all" land in such examples becomes depleted (the "tragedy") because hypothetical shepherds each pursue their maximum individual gain without regard for their peers or the land. What is individually rational (e.g., grazing the most sheep for profit), when multiplied by each shepherd acting in isolation, ends up grossly irrational (e.g., ending the livelihood of **every** shepherd). What works for one cannot work as well for everyone in a given area. But, as discussed below, because such land is not communally **managed** (as true commons are), the so-called Tragedy of the Commons is actually an indictment of what is, essentially, laissez-faire capitalist economic practices!

As Allan Engler points out, *"[s]upporters of capitalism cite what they call the tragedy of the commons to explain the wanton plundering of forests, fish and waterways, but common property is not the problem. When property was held in common by tribes, clans and villages, people*

took no more than their share and respected the rights of others. They cared for common property and when necessary acted together to protect it against those who would damage it. Under capitalism, there is no common property. (Public property is a form of private property, property owned by the a government as a corporate person.) Capitalism recognises only private property and free-for-all property. Nobody is responsible for free-for-all property until someone claims it as his own. He then has a right to do as he pleases with it, a right that is uniquely capitalist. Unlike common or personal property, capitalist property is not valued for itself or for its utility. It is valued for the revenue it produces for its owner. If the capitalist owner can maximise his revenue by liquidating it, he has the right to do that." [Apostles of Greed, pp. 58-59]

So, the **real** problem is that a lot of economists and sociologists conflate this scenario, in which **unmanaged** resources are free for all, with the situation that prevailed in the use of "commons," which were communally **managed** resources in village and tribal communities.

The confusion has, of course, been used to justify the stealing of communal property by the rich and the state. The continued acceptance of this "confusion" in political debate is due to of the utility of the theory for the rich and powerful, who have a vested interest in undermining pre-capitalist social forms and stealing communal resources. Therefore, most examples used to justify the "tragedy of the commons" are **false** examples, based on situations in which the underlying social context is radically different from that involved in using true commons.

In reality, the "tragedy of the commons" comes about only after wealth and private property, backed by the state, starts to eat into and destroy communal life. This is well indicated by the fact that commons existed for thousands of years and only disappeared after the rise of capitalism -- and the powerful central state it requires -- had eroded communal values and traditions. Without the influence of wealth concentrations and the state, people get together and come to agreements over how to use communal resources, and have been doing so for millennia. That was how the commons were managed, so "the tragedy of the commons" would be better called the "*tragedy of private property*."

As E.P. Thompson notes in an extensive investigation on this subject, the tragedy "*argument [is] that since resources held in common are not owned and protected by anyone, there is an inexorable economic logic that dooms them to over-exploitation. . . . Despite its common sense air, what it overlooks is that commoners themselves were not without common sense. Over time and over space the users of commons have developed a rich variety of institutions and community sanctions which have effected restraints and stints upon use. . . . As the old. . . institutions lapsed, so they fed into a vacuum in which political influence, market forces, and popular assertion contested with each other without common rules*" [**Customs in Common**, p. 107].

In practice, of course, both political influence and market forces are dominated by wealth. Popular assertion means little when the state enforces property rights in the interests of the wealthy. "*Parliament and law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land*" [Ibid., p. 163].

The working class is only "left alone" to starve. In practice, the privatisation of communal land has led to massive ecological destruction, while the possibilities of free discussion and agreement are destroyed in the name of "absolute" property rights and the power and authority which goes with them.

For more on this subject, try **The Question of the Commons**, Bonnie M. McCoy and James M. Acheson (ed), Tucson, 1987 and **The Evolution of Cooperation** by Robert Axelrod, Basic Books, 1984.

I.6.1 HOW CAN ANARCHISTS EXPLAIN HOW THE USE OF PROPERTY "OWNED BY EVERYONE IN THE WORLD" WILL BE DECIDED?

First, we need to point out the fallacy normally lying behind this objection. It is assumed that because everyone owns something, that everyone has to be consulted in what it is used for. This, however, applies the logic of private property to non-capitalist social forms. While it is true that everyone owns collective "property" in an anarchist society, it does not mean that everyone **uses** it. Anarchists, therefore, think that those who **use** a part of society's wealth have the most say in what happens to it (e.g. workers' control the means of production they use and the work they do in using it). This does not mean that those using it can do what they like to it. Users are subject to recall by local communities if they are abusing their position (for example, if a workplace was polluting the environment, then the local community could act to close down the

workplace). Thus use rights (or usufruct) replace property rights in a free society.

It is no coincidence that societies that are stateless are also without private property. As Murray Bookchin points out *"an individual appropriation of goods, a personal claim to tools, land, and other resources . . . is fairly common in organic [i.e. aboriginal] societies. . . By the same token, cooperative work and the sharing of resources on a scale that could be called communistic is also fairly common. . . But primary to both of these seemingly contrasting relationships is the practice of usufruct."* [The Ecology of Freedom, p.50]

Such stateless societies are based upon *"the principle of *usufruct, the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources merely by the virtue of the fact they are using them. . . Such resources belong to the user as long as they are being used. Function, in effect, replaces our hallowed concept of possession."* [Op. Cit., p. 50] The future stateless society anarchists hope for would also be based upon such a principle.

As for deciding what a given area of commons is used for, that falls to the local communities who live next to them. If, for example, an anarchosyndicalist factory wants to expand and eat into the commons, then the local community who uses (and so controls) the local commons would discuss it and come to an agreement concerning it. If a minority **really** objects, they can use direct action to put their point across. But anarchists argue that rational debate among equals will not result in too much of that. Or suppose an individual wanted to set up a some allotment in a given area, which had not been allocated as a park. Then he or she would notify the

community assembly by appropriate means (e.g. on a notice board or newspaper), and if no one objected at the next assembly or in a set time-span, the allotment would go ahead, as no one else desired to use the resource in question.

Other communities would be confederated with this one, and joint activity would also be discussed by debate, with a community (like an individual) being free **not** to associate if they so desire. Other communities could and would object to ecologically and individually destructive practices. The interrelationships of both ecosystems and freedom is well known, and it's doubtful that free individuals would sit back and let some amongst them destroy **their** planet.

Therefore, those who use something control it. This means that "users groups" would be created to manage resources used by more than one person. For workplaces this would (essentially) be those who worked there (with, possibly, the input of consumer groups and cooperatives). Housing associations made up of tenants would manage housing and repairs. Resources that are used by associations within society, such as communally owned schools, workshops, computer networks, and so forth, would be managed on a day-to-day basis by those who use them. User groups would decide access rules (for example, time-tables and booking rules) and how they are used, making repairs and improvements. Such groups would be accountable to their local community. Hence, if that community thought that any activities by a group within it was destroying communal resources or restricting access to them, the matter would be discussed at the relevant assembly. In this way, interested parties manage their own activities and the resources they use

(and so would be very likely to have an interest in ensuring their proper and effective use), but without private property and its resulting hierarchies and restrictions on freedom.

Lastly, let us examine clashes of use rights, i.e. cases where two or more people or communities/collectives desire to use the same resource. In general, such problems can be resolved by discussion and decision making by those involved. This process would be roughly as follows: if the contesting parties are reasonable, they would probably mutually agree to allow their dispute to be settled by some mutual friend whose judgment they could trust, or they would place it in the hands of a jury, randomly selected from the community or communities in question. This would take place if they could not come to an agreement between themselves to share the resource in question.

One thing is certain, however: such disputes are much better settled without the interference of authority or the re-creation of private property. If those involved do not take the sane course described above and instead decide to set up a fixed authority, disaster will be the inevitable result. In the first place, this authority will have to be given power to enforce its judgment in such matters. If this happens, the new authority will undoubtedly keep for itself the best of what is disputed, and allot the rest to its friends! By re-introducing private property, such authoritarian bodies would develop sooner, rather than later, with two new classes of oppressors being created -- the property owners and the enforcers of "justice."

It is a strange fallacy to suppose that two people who meet on terms of equality and disagree could not be

reasonable or just, or that a third party with power backed up by violence will be the incarnation of justice itself. Common sense should certainly warn us against such an illusion. Historical "counterexamples" to the claim that people meeting on terms of equality cannot be reasonable or just are suspect, since the history of disagreements with unjust or unreasonable outcomes (e.g. resulting in war) generally involve conflicts between groups with unequal power and within the context of private property and hierarchical institutions.

Communal "property" needs communal structures in order to function. Use rights, and discussion among equals, replace property rights in a free society. Freedom cannot survive if it is caged behind laws enforced by public or private states.

I.6.2 DOESN'T ANY FORM OF COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP INVOLVE RESTRICTING INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY?

This point is expressed in many different forms. John MacKay (an individualist anarchist) puts the point as follows:

"Would you [the social anarchist], in the system of society which you call 'free Communism' prevent individuals from exchanging their labor among themselves by means of their own medium of exchange? And further: Would you prevent them from occupying land for the purpose of personal use?... [The] question was not to be escaped. If he answered 'Yes!' he admitted that society had the right of control over the individual and threw overboard the autonomy of the individual

which he had always zealously defended; if on the other hand he answered 'No!' he admitted the right of private property which he had just denied so emphatically."

However, as is clearly explained above and in sections [B.3](#) and [I.5.7.](#), anarchist theory has a simple and clear answer to this question. This is to recognise that use rights replace property rights. In other words, individuals can exchange their labour as they see fit and occupy land for their own use. This in no way contradicts the abolition of private property, because occupancy and use is directly opposed to private property. Therefore, in a free communist society individuals can use land as they personally wish. If they do so, however, they cannot place claims on the benefits others receive from cooperation and their communal life.

John Mackay goes on to state that *"every serious man must declare himself: for Socialism, and thereby for force and against liberty, or for Anarchism, and thereby for liberty and against force,"* which is a strange statement, as individualist anarchists like Ben Tucker considered themselves socialists and opposed private property. However, MacKay's statement begs the question, does private property support liberty? He does not address or even acknowledge the fact that private property will inevitably lead to the owners of such property gaining control over the individual and so denying them liberty (see [section B.4](#)). Neither does he address the fact that private property requires extensive force (i.e. a state) to protect it against those who use it or could use it.

In other words, MacKay ignores two important aspects of private property. Firstly, that private property is based

upon force, which must be used to ensure the owner's right to exclude others (the main reason for the existence of the state). And secondly, he ignores the anti-libertarian nature of wage labour-- the other side of "private property" -- in which the liberty of employees is obviously restricted by the owners whose property they are hired to use. Therefore, it seems that in the name of "liberty" John MacKay and a host of other "individualists" end up supporting authority and (effectively) some kind of state. This is hardly surprising as private property is the opposite of personal possession, not its base.

Therefore, far from communal property restricting individual liberty (or even personal use of resources) it is in fact its only defense.

I.7 WON'T LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM DESTROY INDIVIDUALITY?

No. Libertarian socialism only suppresses individuality for those who are so shallow that they can't separate their identity from what they own. However, be that as it may, this is an important objection to any form of socialism and, given the example of "socialist" Russia, needs to be discussed more.

The basic assumption behind this question is that capitalism encourages individuality, but this assumption can be faulted on many levels. As Kropotkin noted, *"individual freedom [has] remained, both in theory and in practice, more illusory than real"* [Ethics, p. 27] and that *"the want of development of the personality [leading to herd-psychology] and the lack of individual creative power and initiative are certainly one of the chief defects of our time."* [Op. Cit., p. 28] In effect, modern capitalism has reduced individuality to a parody of what it could be (see section [I.7.4](#)). As Affie Kohn points out, *"our miserable individuality is screwed to the back of our cars in the form of personalized license plates."*

So we see a system which is apparently based on "egoism" and "individuality" but whose members are free to expand as standardized individuals, who hardly express their individuality at all. Far from increasing individuality, capitalism standardizes it and so restricts it - that it survives at all is more an expression of the strength of humanity than any benefits of the capitalist system. This impoverishment of individuality is hardly surprising in a society based on hierarchical institutions

which are designed to assure obedience and subordination.

So, can we say that libertarian socialism will **increase** individuality or is this conformity and lack of "individualism" a constant feature of the human race? In order to make some sort of statement on this, we have to look at non-hierarchical societies and organisations. We will discuss "primitive" cultures as an example of non-hierarchical societies in section [1.7.1](#). Here, however, we indicate how anarchist organisations will protect and increase an individual's sense of self.

Anarchist organisations and tactics are designed to promote individuality. They are decentralised, participatory organisations and so they give those involved the "social space" required to express themselves and develop their abilities and potential in ways restricted under capitalism. As Gaston Leval notes in his book on the anarchist collectives during the Spanish Revolution, *"so far as collective life is concerned, the freedom of each is the right to participate spontaneously with one's thought, one's will, one's initiative to the full extent of one's capacities. A negative liberty is not liberty; it is nothingness."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 346]

By being able to take part in and manage the decision making processes which directly affect you, your ability to think for yourself is increased and so you are constantly developing your abilities and personality. The spontaneous activity described by Leval has important psychological impacts. As Eric Fromm notes, *"[i]n all spontaneous activity, the individual embraces the world. Not only does his [sic] individual self remain intact; it*

becomes stronger and more solidified. For the self is as strong as it is active." [Escape from Freedom, p. 225]

Therefore, individuality does not atrophy within an anarchist organisation and becomes stronger as it participates and acts within the social organisation. In other words, individuality requires community. As Max Horkheimer once observed, *"individuality is impaired when each man decides to fend for himself. . . . The absolutely isolated individual has always been an illusion. The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom, sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society."* [The Eclipse of Reason, p. 135]

The sovereign, self-sufficient individual is as much a product of a healthy community as it is from individual self-realization and the fulfillment of desire. Kropotkin, in **Mutual Aid**, documented the tendency for **community** to enrich and develop **individuality**. As he proved, this tendency is seen throughout human history, which suggests that the abstract individualism of capitalism is more the exception than the rule in social life. In other words, history indicates that by working together with others as equals individuality is strengthened far more than in the so-called "individualism" associated with capitalism.

This communal support for individuality is hardly surprising as individuality is a product of the interaction between **social** forces and individual attributes. The more an individual cuts themselves off from social life, the more likely their individuality will suffer. This can be seen from the 1980's when neoliberal governments

supporting the "radical" individualism associated with free market capitalism were elected in both Britain and the USA. The promotion of market forces lead to social atomisation, social disruption and a more centralised state. As "the law of the jungle" swept across society, the resulting disruption of social life ensured that many individuals became impoverished ethically and culturally as society became increasingly privatised.

In other words, many of the characteristics which we associate with a developed individuality (namely ability to think, to act, to hold ones own opinions and standards and so forth) are (essentially) **social** skills and are encouraged by a well developed community. Remove that social background and these valued aspects of individuality are undermined by fear, lack of social interaction and atomisation. Taking the case of workplaces, for example, surely it is an obvious truism that a hierarchical working environment will marginalise the individual and ensure that they cannot express their opinions, exercise their thinking capacities to the full or manage their own activity. This will have in impact in all aspects of an individual's life.

Hierarchy in all its forms produces oppression and a crushing of individuality (see section [B.1](#)). In such a system, the "*business*" side of group activities would be "*properly carried out*" but at the expense of the individuals involved. Anarchists agree with John Stuart Mill when he asks, under such "*benevolent dictatorship*," "*what sort of human beings can be formed under such a regimen? what development can either their thinking or their active faculties attain under it? . . . Their moral capacities are equally stunted. Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially circumscribed,*

their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed." [Representative Government, pp. 203-4] Like anarchists, Mill tended his critique of political associations into all forms of associations and stated that if "*mankind is to continue to improve*" then in the end one form of association will predominate, "*not that that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in the management, but the association of labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.*" [Collected Works, book II, p. 205]

Hence, anarchism will protect and develop individuality by creating the means by which all individuals can participate in the decisions that affect them, in all aspects of their lives. Anarchism is built upon the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. Authoritarian organisations will create a servile personality, one that feels safest conforming to authority and what is considered normal. A libertarian organisation, one that is based upon participation and self-management will encourage a strong personality, one that knows his or her own mind, thinks for itself and feels confident in his or her own powers.

A libertarian re-organisation of society will be based upon, and encourage, a self-empowerment and self-liberation of the individual and by participation within self-managed organisations, individuals will educate themselves for the responsibilities and joys of freedom. As Carole Pateman points out, "*participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more*

individuals participate the better able they become to do so." [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, pp. 42-43]

Such a re-organisation (as we will see in [section J](#)) is based upon the tactic of *direct action*. This tactic also encourages individuality by encouraging the individual to fight directly, by their own self-activity, that which they consider to be wrong. As Voltairine de Cleyre puts it:

"Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. . . Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action. . . [direct actions] are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation." [**Direct Action**]

Therefore, anarchist tactics base themselves upon self-assertion and this can only develop individuality. Self-activity can only occur when there is an independent, free-thinking self. As self-management is based upon the principle of direct action ("*all co-operative experiments are essentially direct action*") we can suggest that individuality will have little to fear from an anarchist society.

For anarchists, like Mill, real liberty requires social equality. For "*if individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas*

most be so organised that they can participate in decision making." [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Hence individuality will be protected, encouraged and developed in an anarchist society far more than in a class ridden, hierarchical society like capitalism. It is because wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than individuality that anarchists oppose capitalism in the name of socialism -- libertarian socialism, the free association of free individuals.

I.7.1 DO "PRIMITIVE" CULTURES INDICATE THAT COMMUNALISM DEFENDS INDIVIDUALITY?

Yes. In many so-called primitive cultures, we find a strong respect for individuals. As Paul Radin points out, *"If I were to state... what are the outstanding features of aboriginal civilisation, I... would have no hesitation in answering that... respect for the individual, irrespective of age or sex"* is the first one. [**The World of Primitive Man**, p. 11]

Murray Bookchin comments on Radin's statement as follows, *"respect for the individual, which Radin lists first as an aboriginal attribute, deserves to be emphasized, today, in an era that rejects the collective as destructive of individuality on the one hand, and yet, in an orgy of pure egotism, has actually destroyed all the ego boundaries of free-floating, isolated, and atomised individuals on the other. A strong collectivity may be even more supportive of the individual as close studies of certain aboriginal societies reveal, than a 'free market' society with its emphasis on an egoistic, but impoverished, self"* [**Remaking Society**, p. 48]

This individualization associated with "primitive" cultures was also noted by Howard Zinn when he wrote that *"Gary Nash describes Iroquois culture. No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts or jails - the apparatus of authority in European societies - were to be found in the northeast woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet boundaries of acceptable behaviour were firmly set. Though priding themselves on the autonomous individual, the Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong..."* [**Columbus, the Indians and Human Progress, 1492-1992**]

In addition, Native American tribes also indicate that communal living and high standards of living can and do go together. The Cherokees, for example, in the 1870s, *"land was held collectively and life was contented and prosperous"* with the Department of the Interior recognising that it was *"a miracle of progress, with successful production by people living in considerable comfort, a level of education 'equal to that furnished by an ordinary college in the States,' flourishing industry and commerce, an effective constitutional government, a high level of literacy, and a state of 'civilization and enlightenment' comparable to anything known: 'What required five hundred years for the Britons to accomplish in this direction they have accomplished in one hundred years,' the Department declared in wonder."* [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 231]

Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts visited "Indian Territory" in 1883 and described what he found in glowing terms: *"There was not a pauper in that nation, and the nation did not owe a dollar. It built its own capitol, in which we had this examination, and it built its*

schools and its hospitals." No family lacked a home.
[Cited by Chomsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 231]

(It must be mentioned that Dawes recommended that the society must be destroyed because "*[t]hey have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common. . .there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is the bottom of civilization. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress.*" The introduction of capitalism - as usual by state action - resulted in poverty and destitution, again showing the link between capitalism and high living standards is not clear cut, regardless of claims otherwise).

Undoubtedly, having access to the means of production ensured that members of such cultures did not have to place themselves in situations which could produce a servile character structure. As they did not have to follow the orders of a boss they did not have to learn to obey others and so could develop their own abilities to govern themselves. This self-government allowed the development of a custom in such tribes called "*the principle of non-interference*" in anthropology. This is the principle within of defending someone's right to express the opposing view and it is a pervasive principle in the "primitive" world, and it is so much so as to be safely called a "universal".

The principle of non-interference is a powerful principle that extends from the personal to the political, and into every facet of daily life. Most modern people are aghast when they realize the extent to which it is practiced, but

it has proven itself to be an integral part of living anarchy (as many of these communities can be termed, although they would be considered imperfect anarchies in some ways). It means that people simply do not limit the activities of others, period. This in effect makes absolute tolerance a custom, or as the modern would say, a law. But the difference between law and custom is important to point out. Law is dead, and Custom lives (see section [1.7.3](#)).

As modern people we have so much baggage that relates to "interfering" with the lives of others that merely visualizing the situation that would eliminate this daily pastime for many is impossible. But think about it. First of all, in a society where people do not interfere with each other's behavior, people tend to feel trusted and empowered by this simple social fact. Their self-esteem is already higher because they are trusted with the responsibility for making learned and aware choices. This is not fiction, individual responsibility is a key aspect of social responsibility.

Therefore, given the strength of individuality documented in tribes with little or no hierarchical structures within them, can we not conclude that anarchism will defend individuality and even develop it in ways blocked by capitalism? At the very least we can say "possibly," and that is enough to allow us to question that dogma that capitalism is the only system based on respect for the individual.

I.7.2 IS THIS NOT WORSHIPPING THE PAST OR THE "NOBLE SAVAGE"?

No. However, this is a common attack on socialists by supporters of capitalism and on anarchists by Marxists. Both claim that anarchism is "backward looking", opposed to "progress" and desire a society based on inappropriate ideas of freedom. In particular, ideological capitalists maintain that all forms of socialism base themselves on the ideal of the "noble savage" and ignore the need for laws and other authoritarian social institutions to keep people "in check."

Anarchists are well aware of the limitations of the "primitive communist" societies they have used as example of anarchistic tendencies within history or society. They are also aware of the problems associated with using **any** historical period as an example of "anarchism in action." Take for example the "free cities" of Medieval Europe which was used by Kropotkin as an example of the potential of decentralised, confederated communes. He was sometimes accused of being a "Medievalist" (as was William Morris) while all he was doing was indicating that capitalism need not equal progress and that alternative social systems have existed which have encouraged freedom in ways capitalism restricts.

Again it is hardly surprising to find that many supporters of capitalism ignore the insights that can be gained by studying "primitive" cultures and the questions they raise about capitalism and freedom. Instead, they duck the issues raised by these insights and accuse socialists of idealising "the noble savage." As indicated, nothing could be further from the truth. What socialists point out

from this analysis is that the atomised individual associated with capitalist society is not "natural" and that capitalist social relationships help to weaken individuality. All the many attacks on socialist analysis of past societies is a product of capitalists attempts to deny history and state that "Progress" reaches its final resting place in capitalism.

Moreover, as George Orwell points out, such attacks miss the point:

"In the first place he [the defender of modern life] will tell you that it is impossible to 'go back'. . .and will then accuse you of being a medievalist and begin to descant upon the horrors of the Middle Ages. . .As a matter of fact, most attacks upon the Middle Ages and the past generally by apologists of modernity are beside the point, because their essential trick is to protect a modern man, with his squeamishness and his high standard of comfort, into an age when such things were unheard of. But notice that in any case this is not an answer. For dislike of the mechanized future does not imply the smallest reverence for any period of the past. . .When one pictures it merely as an objective; there is no need to pretend that it has ever existed in space and time." [**The Road to Wigan Pier**, p. 183]

We should also note that such attacks on anarchist investigations of past cultures assumes that these cultures have **no** good aspects at all and so indicates a sort of intellectual "all or nothing" approach to modern life. The idea that past (and current) civilisations may have got **some** things right and others wrong and should be investigated is rejected for a totally uncritical "love it or leave" approach to modern society. Of course, the well

known "free market" capitalist love of 19th century capitalist life and values warrants no such claims of "past worship" by the supporters of the system.

Therefore attacks on anarchists as supporters of the "noble savage" ideal indicate more about the opponents of anarchism and their fear of looking at the implications of the system they support than about anarchist theory.

I.7.3 IS THE LAW REQUIRED TO PROTECT INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS?

No, far from it. While it is obvious that, as Kropotkin put it, *"[n]o society is possible without certain principles of morality generally recognised. If everyone grew accustomed to deceiving his fellow-men; if we never could rely on each other's promise and words; if everyone treated his fellow as an enemy, against whom every means of warfare is justified - no society could exist."* [Kropotkin's **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 73]

This does not mean that a legal system (with its resultant bureaucracy, vested interests and inhumanity) is the best way to protect individual rights within a society. What anarchists propose instead of the current legal system (or an alternative law system based on religious or "natural" laws) is **custom** - namely the development of living "rules of thumb" which express what a society considers as right at any given moment.

However, the question arises, if a fixed set of principles are used to determine the just outcome, in what way would this differ from laws?

The difference is that the "order of custom" would prevail rather than the "rule of law". **Custom** is a body of living institutions that enjoys the support of the body politic, whereas **law** is a codified (read dead) body of institutions that separates social control from moral force. This, as anyone observing modern Western society can testify, alienates everyone. A **just outcome** is the predictable, but not necessarily the inevitable outcome of interpersonal conflict because in a traditional anarchistic society people are trusted to do it themselves. Anarchists think people have to grow up in a social environment free from the confusions generated by a fundamental discrepancy between morality, and social control, to fully appreciate the implications. However, the essential ingredient is the investment of trust, by the community, in people to come up with **functional solutions** to interpersonal conflict. This stands in sharp contrast with the present situation of people being infantilized by the state through a constant bombardment of fixed social structures removing all possibility of people developing their own unique solutions.

Therefore, anarchist recognise that social custom changes with society. What was once considered "normal" or "natural" may become to be seen as oppressive and hateful. This is because the *"conception of good or evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it."* [Op. Cit., p. 92] Only by removing the dead hand of the past can society's ethical base develop and grow with the individuals that make it up (see [section A.2.19](#) for a discussion of anarchist ethics).

We should also like to point out here that laws (or "The Law") also restrict the development of an individual's sense of ethics or morality. This is because it relieves them of the responsibility of determining if something is right or wrong. All they need to know is whether it is legal. The morality of the action is irrelevant. This "nationalisation" of ethics is very handy for the would be capitalist, governor or other exploiter. In addition, capitalism also restricts the development of an individual's ethics because it creates the environment where these ethics can be bought. To quote Shakespeare's **Richard III**:

"Second Murderer : . . .Some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.

First Murderer : Remember our reward, when the deed's done.

Second Murderer : Zounds! He dies. I had forgot the reward.

First Murderer : Where's thy conscience now?

Second Murderer : O, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse."

Therefore, as far as "The Law" defending individual rights, it creates the necessary conditions (such as the depersonalisation of ethics, the existence of wealth, and so on) for undermining individual ethical behaviour, and so respect for other individual's rights. Individual rights, for anarchists, are best protected in a social environment based on the self-respect and sympathy. Custom, because it is based on the outcome of numerous individual actions and thought does not have this problem and reflects (and encourages the development of) individual ethical standards and so a generalised respect for others.

Tolerance of other individuals depends far more on the attitudes of the society in question than on its system of laws. In other words, even if the law does respect individual rights, if others in society disapprove of an action then they can and will act to stop it (or restrict individual rights). All that the law can do is try to prevent this occurring. Needless to say, governments can (and have) been at the forefront of ignoring individual rights when it suits them.

In addition, the state perverts social customs for its own, and the economically powerful's interests. As Kropotkin argued, *"The law has used Man's social feelings to get passed not only moral precepts which were acceptable to Man, but also orders which were useful only to the minority of exploiters against whom he would have rebelled"* [quoted by Malatesta in **Anarchy**, pp. 21-22]

Therefore anarchists argue that state institutions are not only unneeded to create an ethical society (i.e. one based on respecting individuality) but activity undermines such a society. That the economically and politically powerful state that a state is a necessary condition for a free society and individual space is hardly surprising. As Malatesta put it:

"A government cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretense of general usefulness. . .it cannot impose acceptances of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all" [**Anarchy**, p. 21]

Therefore, it's important to remember why the state exists and so whatever actions and rights it promotes for the individual it exists to protect the powerful against the

powerless. Any human rights recognised by the state are a product of social struggle and exist because of past victories in the class war and not due to the kindness of ruling elites. In addition, capitalism itself undermines the ethical foundations of any society by encouraging people to grow *"accustomed to deceiving his fellow-men"* and women and treating *"his fellow as an [economic] enemy, against whom every means of warfare is justified."* Hence capitalism undermines the basic social context within which individuals develop and need to become fully human and free. Little wonder that a strong state has always been required to introduce a free market - firstly, to protect wealth from the increasingly dispossessed and secondly, to try to hold society together as capitalism destroys the social fabric which makes a society worth living in.

I.7.4 DOES CAPITALISM PROTECT INDIVIDUALITY?

Given that many people claim that any form of socialism will destroy liberty (and so individuality) its worth while considering whether capitalism actually does protect individuality. As noted briefly [above](#) the answer must be no. Capitalism seems to help create a standardisation which helps to distort individuality and the fact that individuality does exist under capitalism says more about the human spirit than capitalist social relationships.

So, why does a system apparently based on the idea of individual profit result in such a deadening of the individual? There are four main reasons:

- 1) capitalism produces a hierarchical system which crushes self-government in many areas of life (see sections [B.1](#) and [B.4](#)). This, naturally, represses individual initiative and the skills needed to express ones own mind;
- 2) there is the lack of community which does not provide the necessary supports for the encouragement of individuality (see section [I.7](#) and [I.7.1](#));
- 3) there is the psychological impact of "individual profit" when it becomes identified purely with monetary gain (as in capitalism);
- 4) the effects of competition in creating conformity and mindless obedience to authority.

These last two points are worth discussing more thoroughly, and we will do so here.

Taking the third point first, when this kind of "greed" becomes the guiding aspect of an individual's life (and the society they live in) they usually end up sacrificing their own ego's to it. Instead of the individual dominating their "greed," "greed" dominates them and so they end up being possessed by one aspect of themselves. This "selfishness" hides the poverty of ego who practices it.

As Eric Fromm argues:

"Selfishness is not identical with self-love but with its very opposite. Selfishness is one kind of greediness. Like all greediness, it contains an insatiability, as a consequence of which there is never any real satisfaction. Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the

person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction. . . this type of person is basically not fond of himself, but deeply dislikes himself

"The puzzle in this seeming contradiction is easy to solve. Selfishness is rooted in this very lack of fondness for oneself. . .He does not have the inner security which can exist only on the basis of genuine fondness and affirmation." [The Fear of Freedom, pp. 99-100]

In other words, the "selfish" person allows their greed to dominate their egos and they sacrifice their personality to feeding this new "God." This was clearly seen by Max Stirner who denounced this as a *"one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism"* which leads the ego being *"ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices"* (see section [G.6](#)). Like all "spooks," capitalism results in the self-negation of the individual and so the impoverishment of individuality. Little wonder, then, that a system apparently based upon "egoism" and "individualism" ends up weakening individuality.

The effects of competition on individuality are equally as destructive.

Indeed, a "culture dedicated to creating standardized, specialized, predictable human components could find no better way of grinding them out than by making every possible aspect of life a matter of competition. 'Winning out' in this respect does not make rugged individualists. It shapes conformist robots." [George Leonard, *"Winning Isn't Everything. It's Nothing"*, p. 46, **Intellectual Digest**, October, 1975, pp. 45-47]

Why is this?

Competition is based upon outdoing others and this can only occur if you are doing the same thing they are. However, individuality is the most unique thing there is and *"unique characteristics by definition cannot be ranked and participating in the process of ranking demands essential conformity."* [Aflie Kohn, **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, p. 130] According to Kohn in his extensive research into the effects of competition, the evidence suggests that it in fact *"encourages rank conformity"* as well as undermining the *"substantial and authentic kind of individualism"* associated by such free thinkers as Thoreau. [Op. Cit., p. 130, p. 129]

As well as impoverishing individuality by encouraging conformity, competition also makes us less free thinking and rebellious:

"Attitude towards authorities and general conduct do count in the kinds of competitions that take place in the office or classroom. If I want to get the highest grades in class, I will not be likely to challenge the teacher's version of whatever topic is being covered. After a while, I may cease to think critically altogether. . . If people tend to 'go along to get along,' there is even more incentive to go along when the goal is to be number one. In the office or factory where co-workers are rivals, beating out the next person for a promotion means pleasing the boss. Competition acts to extinguish the Promethean fire of rebellion." [Op. Cit., p. 130]

In section I.4.11 ([If libertarian socialism eliminates the profit motive, won't creativity and performance suffer?](#)) we noted that when an artistic task is turned into a contest, children's work reveal significantly less

spontaneity and creativity. In other words, competition reduces creativity and so individuality because creativity is *"anti-conformist at its core: it is nothing if not a process of idiosyncratic thinking and risk-taking. Competition inhibits this process."* [Op. Cit., p. 130]

Competition, therefore, will result in a narrowing of our lives, a failing to experience new challenges in favour of trying to win and be "successful." It turns *"life into a series of contests [and] turns us into cautious, obedient people. We do not sparkle as individuals or embrace collective action when we are in a race."* [Op. Cit., p. 131]

So, far from defending individuality, capitalism places a lot of barriers (both physical and mental) in the path of individuals who are trying to express their freedom. Anarchism exists precisely because capitalism has not created the free society it supporters claimed it would during the struggle against the absolutist state.

I.8 DOES REVOLUTIONARY SPAIN SHOW THAT LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM CAN WORK IN PRACTICE?

Yes. As Murray Bookchin puts it, *"[i]n Spain, millions of people took large segments of the economy into their own hands, collectivized them, administered them, even abolished money and lived by communistic principles of work and distribution -- all of this in the midst of a terrible civil war, yet without producing the chaos or even the serious dislocations that were and still are predicted by authoritarian 'radicals.'* Indeed, in many collectivized areas, the efficiency with which an enterprise worked by far exceeded that of a comparable one in nationalized or private sectors. This 'green shoot' of revolutionary reality has more meaning for us than the most persuasive theoretical arguments to the contrary. On this score it is not the anarchists who are the 'unrealistic day-dreamers,' but their opponents who have turned their backs to the facts or have shamelessly concealed them" [*"Introductory," in The Anarchist Collectives*, ed. Sam Dolgoff, Free Life Editions, 1974]

Sam Dolgoff's book is by far the best English source on the Spanish collectives and deserves to be quoted at length (as we do below). He points out that more than 60% of the land was very quickly collectivized and cultivated by the peasants themselves, *"without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganized and administered production,*

distribution, and public services without capitalists, high-salaried managers, or the authority of the state.

"Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism,

'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.'

They coordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganization of social life. They replaced the war between men, 'survival of the fittest,' by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity" [Ibid.]

According to Gaston Leval in **Espagne Libertaire**, about eight million people directly or indirectly participated in the new economy during the short time it was able to survive the military assaults and of the fascists and the sabotage of the Communists.

Lest the reader think that Dolgoff and Bookchin are exaggerating the accomplishments and ignoring the failures of the Spanish collectives, in the following subsections we will present specific details and answer some objections often raised by misinformed critics. We will try to present an objective analysis of the revolution, both its strong points and weak points, the mistakes

made and possible lessons to be drawn from those mistakes.

I.8.1 WASN'T THE SPANISH REVOLUTION PRIMARILY A RURAL PHENOMENON AND THEREFORE INAPPLICABLE AS A MODEL FOR MODERN INDUSTRIALIZED STATES?

It's true that collectivization was more extensive and lasted longer in the rural areas. However, about 75% of Spanish industry was concentrated in Catalonia, the stronghold of the anarchist labor movement, and widespread collectivization of factories took place there.

As Dolgoff rightly observes, "*[t]his refutes decisively the allegation that anarchist organizational principles are not applicable to industrial areas, and if at all, only in primitive agrarian societies or in isolated experimental communities*" [**Ibid.**, pp. 7-8].

There had been a long tradition of peasant collectivism in the Iberian Peninsula, as there was among the Berbers and in the ancient Russian **mir**. The historians Costa and Reparaz maintain that a great many Iberian collectives can be traced to "*a form of rural libertarian-communism [which] existed in the Iberian Peninsula before the Roman invasion. Not even five centuries of oppression by Catholic kings, the State and the Church have been able to eradicate the spontaneous tendency to establish libertarian communistic communities*" [cited **Ibid.**, p. 20]. So it's not surprising that there were more collectives in the countryside.

According to Augustin Souchy, "*[i]t is no simple matter to collectivize and place on firm foundations an industry employing almost a quarter of a million textile workers in scores of factories scattered in numerous cities. But the Barcelona syndicalist textile union accomplished this feat in a short time. It was a tremendously significant experiment. The dictatorship of the bosses was toppled, and wages, working conditions and production were determined by the workers and their elected delegates. All functionaries had to carry out the instructions of the membership and report back directly to the men on the job and union meetings. The collectivization of the textile industry shatters once and for all the legend that the workers are incapable of administering a great and complex corporation*" [cited **Ibid.**, p. 94].

Therefore the Spanish Revolution cannot be dismissed as a product of pre-industrial society. The urban collectivisations occurred in the most heavily industrialised part of Spain and indicate that anarchist ideas are applicable to modern societies. In addition, by 1936 agriculture itself was predominately capitalist (with 2% of the population owning 67% of the land). The revolution in Spain was the work (mostly) of rural and urban wage labourers (joined with poor peasants) fighting a well developed capitalist system.

I.8.2 HOW WERE THE ANARCHISTS ABLE TO OBTAIN MASS POPULAR SUPPORT IN SPAIN?

Anarchism was introduced in Spain in 1868 by Giuseppe Fanelli, an associate of Michael Bakunin, and found

fertile soil among both the workers and the peasants of Spain.

The peasants supported anarchism because of the rural tradition of Iberian collectivism mentioned in the last section. The urban workers supported it because its ideas of direct action, solidarity and free federation of unions corresponded to their needs in their struggle against capitalism and the state.

In addition, many Spanish workers were well aware of the dangers of centralisation and the republican tradition in Spain was very much influenced by federalist ideas (coming, in part, from Proudhon's work). The movement later spread back and forth between countryside and cities as union organisers and anarchist militants visited villages and as peasants came to industrial cities like Barcelona, looking for work.

Therefore, from the start anarchism in Spain was associated with the labour movement (as Bakunin desired) and so anarchists had a practical area to apply their ideas and spread the anarchist message. By applying their principles in everyday life, the anarchists in Spain ensured that anarchist ideas became commonplace and accepted in a large section of the population.

The Spanish Revolution also shows the importance of anarchist education and media. In a country with a very high illiteracy rate, huge quantities of literature on social revolution were disseminated and read out loud at meetings by those who could read to those who couldn't. Anarchist ideas were widely discussed. *"There were tens of thousands of books, pamphlets and tracts, vast and*

daring cultural and popular educational experiments (the Ferrer schools) that reached into almost every village and hamlet throughout Spain" [Ibid., p. 28].

Newspapers and periodicals were extremely important. By 1919, more than 50 towns in Andalusia had their own libertarian newspapers. By 1934 the C.N.T. [the anarcho-syndicalist labor union] had a membership of 1,500,000 and the anarchist press covered all of Spain. In Barcelona the C.N.T. published a daily, **Solidaridad Obrera**, with a circulation of 30,000. The magazine **Tierra y Libertad** [Land and Liberty] in Barcelona had a circulation of 20,000. In Gijon there was **Vida Obrera** [Working Life], in Seville **El Productor** [The Producer], and in Saragossa **Accion y Cultura** [Action and Culture], all with large circulations. There were many more.

As well as leading struggles, organising unions, and producing books, papers and periodicals, the anarchists also organised libertarian schools, cultural centres, cooperatives, anarchist groups (the F.A.I.), youth groups (the Libertarian Youth) and women's organisations (the Free Women movement). They applied their ideas in all walks of life and so ensured that ordinary people saw that anarchism was practical and relevant to them.

This was the great strength of the Spanish Anarchist movement. It was a movement *"that, in addition to possessing a revolutionary ideology [sic], was also capable of mobilising action around objectives firmly rooted in the life and conditions of the working class.... It was this ability periodically to identify and express widely felt needs and feelings that, together with its presence at community level, formed the basis of the*

strength of radical anarchism, and enabled it to build a mass base of support." [Nick Rider, *"The practice of direct action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931"*, p. 99, from **For Anarchism**, pp. 79-105]

The Spanish anarchists, before and after the C.N.T. was formed, fought in and out of the factory for economic, social and political issues. This refusal of the anarchists to ignore any aspect of life ensured that they found many willing to hear their message, a message based around the ideas of individual liberty. Such a message could do nothing but radicalise workers for *"the demands of the C.N.T. went much further than those of any social democrat: with its emphasis on true equality, autogestion [self-management] and working class dignity, anarchosindicalism made demands the capitalist system could not possibly grant to the workers."* [J. Romero Maura, *"The Spanish case"*, p. 79, from **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter]

The structure and tactics of the C.N.T. encouraged the politicisation, initiative and organisational skills of its members. It was a federal, decentralised body, based on direct discussion and decision making from the bottom up. *"The CNT tradition was to discuss and examine everything"*, as one militant put it. In addition, the C.N.T. created a viable and practical example of an alternative method by which society could be organised. A method which was based on the ability of ordinary people to direct society themselves and which showed in practice that special ruling authorities are undesirable and unnecessary.

The very structure of the C.N.T. and the practical experience it provided its members in self-management

produced a revolutionary working class the likes of which the world has rarely seen. As Jose Peirats points out, *"above the union level, the C.N.T. was an eminently political organisation . . . , a social and revolutionary organisation for agitation and insurrection."* [Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, p. 239] It was the revolutionary nature of the C.N.T. that created a militant membership who were willing and able to use direct action to defend their liberty. Unlike the German workers who did nothing to stop Hitler, the Spanish working class (like their comrades in anarchist unions in Italy) took to the streets to stop fascism.

The revolution in Spain did not just happen; it was the result of nearly seventy years of persistent anarchist agitation and revolutionary struggle, including a long series of peasant uprisings, insurrections, industrial strikes, protests, sabotage and other forms of direct action that prepared the peasants and workers organise popular resistance to the attempted fascist coup in JULY 1937 and to take control of the economy when they had defeated it in the streets.

I.8.3 HOW WERE SPANISH INDUSTRIAL COLLECTIVES ORGANIZED?

The collectives were based on workers' democratic self-management of their workplaces, using productive assets that were under the custodianship of the entire working community and administered through federations of workers' associations. Augustin Souchy writes:

"The collectives organized during the Spanish Civil War were workers' economic associations without private property. The fact that collective plants were managed by those who worked in them did not mean that these establishments became their private property. The collective had no right to sell or rent all or any part of the collectivised factory or workshop, The rightful custodian was the C.N.T., the National Confederation of Workers Associations. But not even the C.N.T. had the right to do as it pleased. Everything had to be decided and ratified by the workers themselves through conferences and congresses." [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 67]

According to Souchy, in Catalonia *"every factory elected its administrative committee composed of its most capable workers. Depending on the size of the factory, the function of these committees included inner plant organization, statistics, finance, correspondence, and relations with other factories and with the community. . . . Several months after collectivization the textile industry of Barcelona was in far better shape than under capitalist management. Here was yet another example to show that grass roots socialism from below does not destroy initiative. Greed is not the only motivation in human relations."* [**Ibid.**, p 95].

A plenum of syndicates met in December of 1936 and formulated norms for socialization in which the inefficiency of the capitalist industrial system was analyzed. The report of the plenum stated:

"The major defect of most small manufacturing shops is fragmentation and lack of technical/commercial preparation. This prevents their modernization and

consolidation into better and more efficient units of production, with better facilities and coordination. . . . [F]or us, socialization must correct these deficiencies and systems of organization in every industry. . . . To socialize an industry, we must consolidate the different units of each branch of industry in accordance with a general and organic plan which will avoid competition and other difficulties impeding the good and efficient organization of production and distribution."

As Souchy points out, this document is very important in the evolution of collectivization, because it indicates a realization that *"workers must take into account that partial collectivization will in time degenerate into a kind of bourgeois cooperativism,"* as discussed earlier (see H.4). Thus many collectives did not compete with each other for profits, as surpluses were pooled and distributed on a wider basis than the individual collective -- in most cases industry-wide.

We have already noted some examples of the improvements in efficiency realized by collectivization during the Spanish Revolution (I.4.10). Another example was the baking industry. Souchy reports that, *"[a]s in the rest of Spain, Barcelona's bread and cakes were baked mostly at night in hundreds of small bakeries. Most of them were in damp, gloomy cellars infested with roaches and rodents. All these bakeries were shut down. More and better bread and cake were baked in new bakeries equipped with new modern ovens and other equipment"* [**Ibid.**, p. 82].

Therefore, the collectives in Spain were marked by workplace democracy and a desire to cooperate within and across industries. This attempt at libertarian

socialism, like all experiments, had its drawbacks as well as successes and these will be discussed in the next section and some conclusions drawn from the experience.

I.8.4 HOW WERE THE SPANISH INDUSTRIAL COLLECTIVES COORDINATED?

The methods of cooperation tried by the collectives varied considerably. Initially, there were very few attempts to coordinate economic activities beyond the workplace. This is hardly surprising, given that the overwhelming need was to restart production, convert a civilian economy to a wartime one and to ensure that the civilian population and militias were supplied with necessary goods. This, unsurprisingly enough, led to a situation of anarchist mutualism developing, with many collectives selling the product of their own labour on the market (in other words, a form of simple commodity production).

This led to some economic problems as there existed no framework of institutions between collectives to ensure efficient coordination of activity and so led to pointless competition between collectives (which led to even more problems). As there were initially no confederations of collectives nor mutual/communal banks this led to the inequalities that initially existed between collectives (due to the fact that the collectives took over rich and poor capitalist firms) and it made the many ad hoc attempts at mutual aid between collectives.

Therefore, the collectives were (initially) a form of *"self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which*

we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates." [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227-8] As economic and political development are closely related, the fact that the C.N.T. did not carry out the **political** aspect of the revolution meant that the revolution in the economy was doomed to failure.

Given that the C.N.T. program of libertarian communism recognized that a fully cooperative society must be based upon production for use, many C.N.T. militants fought against this system of mutualism and for inter-workplace coordination. They managed to convince their fellow workers of the difficulties of mutualism by free debate and discussion within their unions and collectives.

For example, the woodworkers' union had a massive debate on socialisation and decided to do so (the shopworkers' union had a similar debate, but the majority of workers rejected socialisation). According to Ronald Frazer a *"union delegate would go round the small shops, point out to the workers that the conditions were unhealthy and dangerous, that the revolution was changing all this, and secure their agreement to close down and move to the union-built Double-X and the 33 EU."* [Ronald Frazer, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222]

This process went on in many different unions and collectives and, unsurprisingly, the forms of coordination agreed to lead to different forms of organisation in different areas and industries, as would be expected in a free society. However, the two most important forms can be termed **syndicalisation** and **confederalism** (we will ignore the forms created by the collectivisation

decree as these were not created by the workers themselves).

"Syndicalisation" (our term) meant that the C.N.T.'s industrial union ran the whole industry. This solution was tried by the woodworkers' union after extensive debate. One section of the union, *"dominated by the F.A.I. [the anarchist federation], maintained that anarchist self-management meant that the workers should set up and operate autonomous centres of production so as to avoid the threat of bureaucratization."* [Ronald Frazer, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222] However, those in favour of syndicalisation won the day and production was organised in the hands of the union, with administration posts and delegate meetings elected by the rank and file.

However, the *"major failure . . . (and which supported the original anarchist objection) was that the union became like a large firm . . . [and its] structure grew increasingly rigid."* According to one militant, *"From the outside it began to look like an American or German trust"* and the workers found it difficult to secure any changes and *"felt they weren't particularly involved in decision making."*

In the end, the major difference between the union-run industry and a capitalist firm organisationally appeared to be that workers could vote for (and recall) the industry management at relatively regular General Assembly meetings. While a vast improvement on capitalism, it is hardly the best example of participatory self-management in action although the economic problems caused by the Civil War and Stalinist led counter-revolution obviously would have had an effect on the

internal structure of any industry and so we cannot say that the form of organisation created was totally responsible for any marginalisation that took place.

The other important form of cooperation was what we will term "**confederalisation**." This form of cooperation was practiced by the Badalona textile industry (and had been defeated in the woodworkers' union). It was based upon each workplace being run by its elected management, sold its own production, got its own orders and received the proceeds. However, everything each mill did was reported to the union which charted progress and kept statistics. If the union felt that a particular factory was not acting in the best interests of the industry as a whole, it was informed and asked to change course. According to one militant, "*The union acted more as a socialist control of collectivised industry than as a direct hierarchized executive*" [Op. Cit., p. 229]

This system ensured that the "*dangers of the big 'union trust' as of the atomised collective were avoided*" [Frazer, Op. Cit., p. 229] as well as maximising decentralisation of power. Unlike the syndicalisation experiment in the woodworkers' industry, this scheme was based on horizontal links between workplaces (via the C.N.T. union) and allowed a maximum of self-management **and** mutual aid. The ideas of an anarchist economy sketched in section [1.3](#) reflects the actual experiments in self-management which occurred during the Spanish Revolution.

Therefore, the industrial collectives coordinated their activity in many ways, with varying degrees of direct democracy and success. As would be expected, mistakes

were made and different solutions found. When reading this section of the FAQ its important to remember that an anarchist society can hardly be produced "overnight" and so it is hardly surprising that the workers of the C.N.T. faced numerous problems and had to develop their self-management experiment as objective conditions allowed them to.

Unfortunately, thanks to fascist aggression and Communist Party backstabbing, the experiment did not last long enough to fully answer all the questions we have about the viability of the solutions they tried. Given the time, however, we are sure they would have solved the problems they faced.

I.8.5 HOW WERE THE SPANISH AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES ORGANIZED AND COORDINATED?

Jose Peirats describes collectivization among the peasantry as follows:

"The expropriated lands were turned over to the peasant syndicates, and it was these syndicates that organized the first collectives. Generally the holdings of small property owners were respected, always on the condition that only they or their families would work the land, without employing wage labor. In areas like Catalonia, where the tradition of petty peasant ownership prevailed, the land holdings were scattered. There were no great estates. Many of these peasants, together with the C.N.T., organized collectives, pooling their land, animals, tools, chickens, grain, fertilizer, and even their harvested crops.

"Privately owned farms located in the midst of collectives interfered with efficient cultivation by splitting up the collectives into disconnected parcels. To induce owners to move, they were given more or even better land located on the perimeter of the collective.

*"The collectivist who had nothing to contribute to the collective was admitted with the same rights and the same duties as the others. In some collectives, those joining had to contribute their money (Girondella in Catalonia, Lagunarrotta in Aragon, and Cervera del Maestra in Valencia)." [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 112].*

Peirats also notes that in conducting their internal affairs, all the collectives scrupulously and zealously observed democratic procedures. For example, *"Hospitalet de Llobregat held regular general membership meetings every three months to review production and attend to new business. The administrative council, and all other committees, submitted full reports on all matters. The meeting approved, disapproved, made corrections, issued instructions, etc."* [**Ibid.**, p. 119]

Dolgoft observes that *"[S]upreme power was vested in, and actually exercised by, the membership in general assemblies, and all power derived from, and flowed back to, the grass roots organizations of the people"* [**Ibid.**, p. 119]. This is confirmed by Gaston Leval [in **Espagne Liberataire**, p. 219]: *"Regular general membership meetings were convoked weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. . . and these meetings were completely free of the tensions and recriminations which inevitably emerge when the power of decisions is vested in a few individuals -- even if democratically elected. The Assemblies were open for*

everyone to participate in the proceedings. Democracy embraced all social life. In most cases, even the 'individualists' who were not members of the collective could participate in the discussions, and they were listened to by the collectivists."

It was in these face-to-face assemblies that decisions upon the distribution of resources were decided both within and without the collective. Here, when considering the importance of mutual aid, appeals were made to an individual's sense of empathy. As one activist remembers:

"There were, of course, those who didn't want to share and who said that each collective should take care of itself. But they were usually convinced in the assemblies. We would try to speak to them in terms they understood. We'd ask, 'Did you think it was fair when the cacique [local boss] let people starve if there wasn't enough work?' and they said, 'Of course not.' They would eventually come around. Don't forget, there were three hundred thousand collectivists [in Aragon], but only ten thousand of us had been members of the C.N.T.. We had a lot of educating to do." [Felix Carrasquer, quoted in **Free Women of Spain**, p. 79]

In addition, regional federations of collectives were formed in many areas of Spain (for example, in Aragon and the Levant). The federations were created at congresses to which the collectives in an area sent delegates. These congresses agreed a series of general rules about how the federation would operate and what commitments the affiliated collectives would have to each other. The congress elected an administration

council, which took responsibility for implementing agreed policy.

These federations had many tasks. They ensured the distribution of surplus produce to the front line and to the cities, cutting out middlemen and ensuring the end of exploitation. They also arranged for exchanges between collectives to take place. In addition, the federations allowed the individual collectives to pool resources together in order to improve the infrastructure of the area (building roads, canals, hospitals and so on) and invest in means of production which no one collective could afford.

In this way individual collectives pooled their resources, increased and improved the means of production they had access to as well as improving the social infrastructure of their regions. All this, combined with an increase of consumption at the point of production and the feeding of militia men and women fighting the fascists at the front.

Rural collectivisations allowed the potential creative energy that existed among the rural workers and peasants to be unleashed, an energy that had been wasted under private property. The popular assemblies allowed community problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. This enabled rural Spain to be transformed from one marked by poverty and fear, into one of hope and experimentation (see the [next section](#) for a few examples of this experimentation).

Therefore self-management in collectives combined with cooperation in rural federations allowed an improvement in quality of rural life. From a purely economic viewpoint, production increased and as Benjamin Martin summarises, "*[t]hough it is impossible to generalize about the rural land takeovers, there is little doubt that the quality of life for most peasants who participated in cooperatives and collectives notably improved.*" [**The Agony of Modernization**, p. 394]

More importantly, however, this improvement in the quality of life included an increase in freedom as well as in consumption. To requote the member of the Beceite collective in Aragon we cited in [section A.5.6](#), "*it was marvellous. . . to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful.*" [Ronald Frazer, **Blood of Spain**, p. 288]

I.8.6 WHAT DID THE AGRICULTURAL COLLECTIVES ACCOMPLISH?

Here are a few examples cited by Jose Peirats: "*In Montblanc the collective dug up the old useless vines and planted new vineyards. The land, improved by modern cultivation with tractors, yielded much bigger and better crops. . . . Many Aragon collectives built new roads and repaired old ones, installed modern flour mills, and processed agricultural and animal waste into useful industrial products. Many of these improvements were first initiated by the collectives. Some villages, like*

Calanda, built parks and baths. Almost all collectives established libraries, schools, and cultural centers." [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 116].

Gaston Leval points out that *"the Peasant Federation of Levant . . . produced more than half of the total orange crop in Spain: almost four million kilos (1 kilo equals about 2 and one-fourth pounds). It then transported and sold through its own commercial organization (no middlemen) more than 70% of the crop. (The Federations's commercial organization included its own warehouses, trucks, and boats. Early in 1938 the export section established its own agencies in France: Marseilles, Perpignan, bordeaux, Cherbourg, and Paris.) Out of a total of 47,000 hectares in all Spain devoted to rice production, the collective in the Province of Valencia cultivated 30,000 hectares."* [cited **Ibid.**, p. 124]

To quote Peirats again: *"Preoccupation with cultural and pedagogical innovations was an event without precedent in rural Spain. The Amposta collectivists organized classes for semi-literates, kindergartens, and even a school of arts and professions. The Seros schools were free to all neighbors, collectivists or not. Grau installed a school named after its most illustrious citizen, Joaquin Costa. The Calanda collective (pop. only 4,500) schooled 1,233 children. The best students were sent to the Lyceum in Caspe, with all expenses paid by the collective. The Alcoriza (pop. 4,000) school was attended by 600 children. Many of the schools were installed in abandoned convents. In Granadella (pop. 2,000), classes were conducted in the abandoned barracks of the Civil Guards. Graus organized a print library and a school of arts and professions, attended by*

60 pupils. The same building housed a school of fine arts and high grade museum. In some villages a cinema was installed for the first time. The Penalba cinema was installed in a church. Viladecana built an experimental agricultural laboratory.

"The collectives voluntarily contributed enormous stocks of provisions and other supplies to the fighting troops. Utiel sent 1,490 litres of oil and 300 bushels of potatoes to the Madrid front (in addition to huge stocks of beans, rice, buckwheat, etc.). Porales de Tujana sent great quantities of bread, oil, flour, and potatoes to the front, and eggs, meat, and milk to the military hospital.

"The efforts of the collectives take on added significance when we take into account that their youngest and most vigorous workers were fighting in the trenches. 200 members of the little collective of Vilaboi were at the front; from Viledecans, 60; Amposta, 300; and Calande, 500." [Ibid., pp. 116-120].

Peirats sums up the accomplishments of the agricultural collectives as follows: *"In distribution the collectives' cooperatives eliminated middlemen, small merchants, wholesalers, and profiteers, thus greatly reducing consumer prices. The collectives eliminated most of the parasitic elements from rural life, and would have wiped them out altogether if they were not protected by corrupt officials and by the political parties. Non-collectivized areas benefited indirectly from the lower prices as well as from free services often rendered by the collectives (laundries, cinemas, schools, barber and beauty parlors, etc.)."* [Ibid., p114].

Leval emphasizes the following achievements (among others): *"In the agrarian collectives solidarity was practiced to the greatest degree. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favored by nature. In Castile special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy.*

"Had the political compromise not impeded open socialization, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalized.

"A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, the women received the same wages as men; in the rest the women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely live alone.

"In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levant, Castile, Andalusia, and Estremadura, the workers formed groups to divide the labor or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organization arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative.

"In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock raising:

the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns." [**Ibid.**, pp. 166-167].

I.8.7 I'VE HEARD THAT THE RURAL COLLECTIVES WERE
CREATED BY FORCE. IS THIS TRUE?

No, it is not. The myth that the rural collectives were created by "terror," organised and carried out by the anarchist militia, was started by the Stalinists of the Spanish Communist Party. More recently, some right-wing Libertarians have warmed up and repeated these Stalinist fabrications. Anarchists have been disproving these allegations since 1936 and it is worthwhile to do so again here.

As Vernon Richards notes, "*[h]owever discredited Stalinism may appear to be today the fact remains that the Stalinist lies and interpretation of the Spanish Civil War still prevail, presumably because it suits the political prejudices of those historians who are currently interpreting it.*" [Introduction to Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 11] Here we shall present evidence to refute claims that the rural collectives were created by force.

Firstly, we should point out that rural collectives were created in many different areas of Spain, such as the Levant (900 collectives), Castile (300) and Estremadura (30), where the anarchist militia did not exist. In Catalonia, for example, the C.N.T. militia passed through many villages on its way to Aragon and only

around 40 collectives were created unlike the 450 in Aragon. In other words, the rural collectivisation process occurred independently of the existence of anarchist troops, with the majority of the 1,700 rural collectives created in areas without a predominance of anarchist troops.

One historian, Ronald Frazer, seems to imply that the Aragon Collectives were imposed upon the Aragon population. As he puts it the *"collectivization, carried out under the general cover, if not necessarily the direct agency, of C.N.T. militia columns, represented a revolutionary minority's attempt to control not only production but consumption for egalitarian purposes and the needs of the war."* [**Blood of Spain**, p. 370] Notice that he does not suggest that the anarchist militia actually **imposed** the collectives, a claim for which there is little or no evidence. Earlier he states that *"There was no need to dragoon them [peasants] at pistol point [into collectives]: the coercive climate, in which 'fascists' were being shot, was sufficient. 'Spontaneous' and 'forced' collectives existed, as did willing and unwilling collectivists within them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p.349]

Therefore, his suggestion that the Aragon collectives were imposed upon the rural population is based upon the insight that there was a *"coercive climate"* in Aragon at the time. Of course a civil war against fascism would produce a "coercive climate," particularly at the front line, and so the C.N.T. can hardly be blamed for that. In addition, in a life and death struggle against fascism, in which the fascists were systematically murdering vast numbers of anarchists, socialists and republicans in the areas under their control, it is hardly surprising that some anarchist troops took the law into their own hands and

murdered some of those who supported and would help the fascists. Given what was going on in fascist Spain, and the experience of fascism in Germany and Italy, the C.N.T. militia knew exactly what would happen to them and their friends and family if they lost.

The question does arise, however, of whether the climate was made so coercive by the war and the nearness of the anarchist militia that individual choice was impossible?

The facts speak for themselves -- rural collectivization in Aragon embraced more than 70% of the population in the area saved from fascism. Around 30% of the population felt safe enough not to join a collective, a sizable percentage.

If the collectives had been created by anarchist terror or force, we would expect a figure of 100% membership in the collectives. This was not the case, indicating the basically voluntary nature of the experiment (we should point out that other figures suggest a lower number of collectivists which makes the forced collectivisation argument even less likely). In addition, if the C.N.T. militia had forced peasants into collectives we would expect the membership of the collectives to peak in size almost overnight, not grow slowly over time. However, this is what happened:

"At the regional congress of collectives, held at Caspe in mid-February 1937, nearly 80 000 collectivists were represented from 'almost all the villages of the region.' This, however, was but a beginning. By the end of April the number of collectivists had risen to 140 000; by the end of the first week of May to 180 000; and by the end of June to 300 000." [Graham Kelsey, *"Anarchism in*

Aragon," pp. 60-82, **Spain in Conflict 1931-1939**, Martin Blinkhorn (ed), p. 61]

If the collectives has been created by force, then their membership would have been 300 000 in February, 1937, not increasing steadily to reach that number four months later. Neither can it be claimed that the increase was due to new villages being collectivised, as almost all villages had sent delegates in February. This indicates that many peasants joined the collectives because of the advantages associated with common labour, the increased resources it placed at their hands and the fact that the surplus wealth which had in the previous system been monopolised by the few was used instead to raise the standard of living of the entire community.

The voluntary nature of the collectives is again emphasized by the number of collectives which allowed smallholders to remain outside. According to evidence Frazer presents (on page 366), an FAI schoolteacher is quoted as saying that the forcing smallholders into the collective *"wasn't a widespread problem, because there weren't more than twenty or so villages where collectivisation was total and no one was allowed to remain outside..."* Instead of forcing the minority in a village to agree with the wishes of the majority, the vast majority (95%) of Aragon collectives stuck to their libertarian principles and allowed those who did not wish to join to remain outside.

So, only around 20 were "total" collectives (out of 450) and around 30% of the population felt safe enough **not** to join. In other words, in the vast majority of collectives those joining could see that those who did not were safe. These figures should not be discounted, as they give an

indication of the basically spontaneous and voluntary nature of the movement.

As was the composition of the new municipal councils created after July 19th. As Graham Kesley notes, *"[w]hat is immediately noticeable from the results is that although the region has often been branded as one controlled by anarchists to the total exclusion of all other forces, the C.N.T. was far from enjoying the degree of absolute domination often implied and inferred."* [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 198]

In his account of the rural revolution, Burnett Bollton notes that *"many of the 450 collectives of the region were largely voluntary"* although *"it must be emphasized that this singular development was in some measure due to the presence of militiamen from the neighboring region of Catalonia, the immense majority of whom were members of the C.N.T. and FAI."*

As Gaston Leval points out, *"it is true that the presence of these forces . . . favoured indirectly these constructive achievements by preventing active resistance by the supporters of the bourgeois republic and of fascism."* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 90]

In other words, the presence of the militia changed the balance of class forces in Aragon by destroying the capitalist state (i.e. the local bosses - caciques - could not get state aid to protect their property) and many landless workers took over the land. The presence of the militia ensured that land could be taken over by destroying the capitalist "monopoly of force" that existed before the revolution (the power of which will be highlighted

below) and so the C.N.T. militia allowed the possibility of experimentation by the Aragonese population.

This class war in the countryside is reflected by Bolloten's statement that "*[if] the individual farmer viewed with dismay the swift and widespread collectivisation of agriculture, the farm workers of the Anarchosyndicalist C.N.T. and the Socialist UGT saw it as the commencement of a new era.*" [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 63] Both were mass organisations and supported collectivisation.

Therefore, anarchist militia allowed the rural working class to abolish the artificial scarcity of land created by private property (and enforced by the state). The rural bosses obviously viewed with horror the possibility that they could not exploit day workers' labour. As Bolloten points out "*the collective system of agriculture threaten[ed] to drain the rural labour market of wage workers.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 62] Little wonder the richer peasants and landowners hated the collectives.

Bolloten also quotes a report on the district of Valderrobes which indicates popular support for the collectives:

"Collectivisation was nevertheless opposed by opponents on the right and adversaries on the left. If the eternally idle who have been expropriated had been asked what they thought of collectivisation, some would have replied that it was robbery and others a dictatorship. But, for the elderly, the day workers, the tenant farmers and small proprietors who had always been under the thumb of the big landowners and heartless usurers, it appeared as salvation" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 71]

However, most historians ignore the differences in class that existed in the countryside. They ignore it and explain the rise in collectives in Aragon (and ignore those elsewhere) as the result of the C.N.T. militia. Frazer, for example, states that "*[v]ery rapidly collectives. . . began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the C.N.T. leadership - no more than had the [industrial] collectives in Barcelona. Here, as there, the initiative came from C.N.T. militants; here, as there, the 'climate' for social revolution in the rearguard was created by C.N.T. armed strength: the anarcho-syndicalists' domination of the streets of Barcelona was re-enacted in Aragon as the C.N.T. militia columns, manned mainly by Catalan anarcho-syndicalist workers, poured in. Where a nucleus of anarcho-syndicalists existed in a village, it seized the moment to carry out the long-awaited revolution and collectivized spontaneously. Where there was none, villagers could find themselves under considerable pressure from the militias to collectivize. . .*" [Op. Cit., p. 347]

In other words, he implies that the revolution was mostly imported into Aragon from Catalonia. However, the majority of C.N.T. column leaders were opposed to the setting up of the Council of Aragon (a confederation for the collectives) [Frazer, **Op. Cit.**, p. 350]. Hardly an example of Catalan C.N.T. imposed social revolution. The evidence we have suggests that the Aragon C.N.T. was a widespread and popular organisation, suggesting that the idea that the collectives were imported into Aragon by the Catalan C.N.T. is simply **false**.

Frazer states that in "*some [of the Aragonese villages] there was a flourishing C.N.T., in others the UGT was strongest, and in only too many there was no*

unionisation at all." [**Blood of Spain**, p. 348] The question arises of how extensive was that strength. The evidence we have suggests that it was extensive, strong and growing, so indicating that rural Aragon was not without a C.N.T. base, a base that makes the suggestion of imposed collectives a false one.

Murray Bookchin summarises the strength of the C.N.T. in rural Aragon as follows:

"The authentic peasant base of the C.N.T. [by the 1930s] now lay in Aragon . . . [C.N.T. growth in Zaragoza] provided a springboard for a highly effective libertarian agitation in lower Aragon, particularly among the impoverished laborers and debt-ridden peasantry of the dry steppes region." [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 220]

Graham Kelsey, in his social history of the C.N.T. in Aragon between 1930 and 1937, provides the necessary evidence to more than back Bookchin's claim of C.N.T. growth. Kelsey points out that as well as the *"spread of libertarian groups and the increasing consciousness among C.N.T. members of libertarian theories . . . contribu[ting] to the growth of the anarchosyndicalist movement in Aragon"* the existence of *"agrarian unrest"* also played an important role in that growth [**Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, pp.80-81]. This all lead to the *"revitalisation of the C.N.T. network in Aragon"* [p. 82] and so by 1936, the C.N.T. had built upon the *"foundations laid in 1933. . . [and] had finally succeeded in translating the very great strength of the urban trade-union organisation in Zaragoza into a regional network of considerable extent."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 134]

Kelsey and other historians note the long history of anarchism in Aragon, dating back to the late 1860s. However, before the 1910s there had been little gains in rural Aragon by the C.N.T. due to the power of local bosses (called *caciques*):

*"Local landowners and small industrialists, the **caciques** of provincial Aragon, made every effort to enforce the closure of these first rural anarchosyndicalist cells [created after 1915]. By the time of the first rural congress of the Aragonese CNT confederation in the summer of 1923, much of the progress achieved through the organization's considerable propaganda efforts had been countered by repression elsewhere."* [Graham Kelsey, "Anarchism in Aragon," p. 62]

A C.N.T. activist indicates the power of these bosses and how difficult it was to be a union member in Aragon:

"Repression is not the same in the large cities as it is in the villages where everyone knows everybody else and where the Civil Guards are immediately notified of a comrade's slightest movement. Neither friends nor relatives are spared. All those who do not serve the state's repressive forces unconditionally are pursued, persecuted and on occasions beaten up." [cited by Kelsey, **Op. Cit.**, p. 74]

However, while there were some successes in organising rural unions, even in 1931 *"propaganda campaigns which led to the establishment of scores of village trade-union cells, were followed by a counter-offensive from village **caciques** which forced them to close."* [**Ibib.**, p. 67] But even in the face of this repression the C.N.T. grew and *"from the end of 1932. . . [there was] a*

successful expansion of the anarchosyndicalist movement into several parts of the region where previously it had never penetrated." [Kesley, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 185]

This growth was built upon in 1936, with increased rural activism which had slowly eroded the power of the **caciques** (which in part explains their support for the fascist coup). After the election of the Popular Front, years of anarchist propaganda and organisation paid off with a massive increase in rural membership in the C.N.T.:

"The dramatic growth in rural anarch-syndicalist support in the six weeks since the general election was emphasized in the [Aragon CNT's April] congress's agenda. . . the congress directed its attention to rural problems . . . [and agreed a programme which was] exactly what was to happen four months later in liberated Aragon." [Kesley, "Anarchism in Aragon", p. 76]

In the aftermath of a regional congress, held in Zaragoza at the start of April, a series of intensive propaganda campaigns was organized through each of the provinces of the regional confederation. Many meetings were held in villages which had never before heard anarcho-syndicalist propaganda. This was very successful and by the beginning of June, 1936, the number of Aragon unions had topped 400, compared to only 278 one month earlier (an increase of over 40% in 4 weeks). [**Ibib.** , pp. 75-76]

This increase in union membership reflects increased social struggle by the Aragonese working population and their attempts to improve their standard of living, which was very low for most of the population. A journalist from the conservative-Catholic **Heraldo de Aragon** visited lower Aragon in the summer of 1935 and noted *"The hunger in many homes, where the men are not working, is beginning to encourage the youth to subscribe to misleading teachings."* [cited by Kesley, **Ibib.**, p. 74]

Little wonder, then, the growth in CNT membership and social struggle Kesley indicates:

"Evidence of a different kind was also available that militant trade unionism in Aragon was on the increase. In the five months between mid-February and mid-July 1936 the province of Zaragoza experienced over seventy strikes, more than had previously been recorded in any entire year, and things were clearly no different in the other two provinces . . . the great majority of these strikes were occurring in provincial towns and villages. Strikes racked the provinces and in at least three instances were actually transformed into general strikes." [**Ibib.**, p. 76]

Therefore, in the spring and summer of 1936, we see a massive growth in C.N.T. membership which reflects growing militant struggle by the urban and rural population of Aragon. Years of C.N.T. propaganda and organising had ensured this growth in C.N.T. influence, a growth which is also reflected in the creation of collectives in liberated Aragon during the revolution. Therefore, the construction of a collectivized society was founded directly upon the emergence, during the five

years of the Second Republic, of a mass trade-union movement infused by libertarian, anarchist principles. These collectives were constructed in accordance with the programme agreed at the Aragon C.N.T. conference of April 1936 which reflected the wishes of the rural membership of the unions within Aragon (and due to the rapid growth of the C.N.T. afterwards obviously reflected popular feelings in the area).

In the words of Graham Kesley, *"libertarian dominance in post-insurrection Aragon itself reflected the predominance that anarchists had secured before the war; by the summer of 1936 the CNT had succeeded in establishing throughout Aragon a mass trade-union movement of strictly libertarian orientation, upon which widespread and well-supported network the extensive collective experiment was to be founded."* [Ibib., p. 61]

Additional evidence that supports a high level of C.N.T. support in rural Aragon can be provided by the fact that it was Aragon that was the center of the December 1933 insurrection organised by the C.N.T. As Bookchin notes, *"only Aragon rose on any significant scale, particularly Saragossa . . . many of the villages declared libertarian communism and perhaps the heaviest fighting took place between the vineyard workers in Rioja and the authorities."* [M. Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 256]

It is unlikely for the C.N.T. to organise an insurrection in an area within which it had little support or influence. According to Kesley's in-depth social history of Aragon, *"it was precisely those areas which had most important in December 1933 . . . which were now [in 1936], in seeking to create a new pattern of economic and social organisation, to form the basis of libertarian Aragon"*

[G. Kesley, **Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 161] After the revolt, thousands of workers were jailed, with the authorities having to re-open closed prisons and turn at least one disused monastrey into a jail due to the numbers arrested.

Therefore, it can be seen that the majority of collectives in Aragon were the product of C.N.T. (and U.G.T) influenced workers taking the opportunity to create a new form of social life, a form marked by its voluntary and directly democratic nature. For from being unknown in rural Aragon, the C.N.T. was well established and growing at a fast rate - *"Spreading out from its urban base... the C.N.T., first in 1933 and then more extensively in 1936, succeeded in converting an essentially urban organisation into a truly regional confederation."* [Ibib., p. 184]

Therefore the evidence suggests that historians like Frazer are wrong to imply that the Aragon collectives were created by the C.N.T. militia and enforced upon a unwilling population. The Aragon collectives were the natural result of years of anarchist activity within rural Aragon and directly related to the massive growth in the C.N.T. between 1930 and 1936. Thus Kesley is correct to state that:

"Libertarian communism and agrarian collectivisation were not economic terms or social principles enforced upon a hostile population by special teams of urban anarchosyndicalists . . ." [G. Kesley, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

This is not to suggest that there were **no** examples of people joining collectives involuntarily because of the

"coercive climate" of the front line. And, of course, there were villages which did not have a C.N.T. union within them before the war and so created a collective because of the existence of the C.N.T. militia. But these can be considered as exceptions to the rule.

Moreover, the way the C.N.T. handled such a situation is noteworthy. Frazer indicates such a situation in the village of Alloza. In the autumn of 1936, representatives of the C.N.T. district committee had come to suggest that the villagers collectivise (we would like to stress here that the C.N.T. militia which had passed through the village had made no attempt to create a collective there).

A village assembly was called and the C.N.T. explained their ideas and suggested how to organise the collective. However, who would join and how the villagers would organise the collective was left totally up to them (the C.N.T. representatives "*stressed that no one was to be maltreated*"). Within the collective, self-management was the rule.

According to one member, "*Once the work groups were established on a friendly basis and worked their own lands, everyone got on well enough,*" he recalled. "*There was no need for coercion, no need for discipline and punishment. . . A collective wasn't a bad idea at all.*" [Op. Cit., p. 360]. This collective, like the vast majority, was voluntary and democratic - "*I couldn't oblige him to join; we weren't living under a dictatorship.*" [Op. Cit., p. 362] In other words, **no** force was used to create the collective and the collective was organised by local people directly.

Of course, as with any public good (to use economic jargon), all members of the community had to pay for the war effort and feed the militia. As Kesely notes, *"The military insurrection had come at a critical moment in the agricultural calendar. Throughout lower Aragon there were fields of grain ready for harvesting. . . At the assembly in Albalate de Cinca the opening clause of the agreed programme had required everyone in the district, independent farmers and collectivists alike, to contribute equally to the war effort, thereby emphasizing one of the most important considerations in the period immediately following the rebellion."*

In addition, the collectives controlled the price of crops in order to ensure that speculation and inflation were controlled. However, these policies as with the equal duties of individualists and collectivists in the war effort were enforced upon the collectives by the war.

Lastly, in support of the popular nature of the rural collectives, we will indicate the effects of the suppression of the collectives in August 1937 by the Communists, namely the collapse of the rural economy. This sheds considerable light on the question of popular attitudes to the collectives.

At a meeting of the agrarian commission of the Aragonese Communist Party (October 9th, 1937), Jose Silva emphasized *"the little incentive to work of the entire peasant population"* and that the situation brought about by the dissolution of the collectives was *"grave and critical."* [quoted by Bolloten, **Op. Cit.**, p. 530] A few days earlier the Communist-controlled Regional Delegation of Agrarian Reform acknowledged that *"in*

the majority of villages agricultural work was paralyzed causing great harm to our agrarian economy." [Ibid.]

Jose Peirats explains the reasons for this economic collapse as a result of popular boycott: *"When it came time to prepare for the next harvest, smallholders could not by themselves work the property on which they had been installed [by the communists]. Dispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour."* [Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, p. 258]

If the collectives were unpopular, created by anarchist force, then why did the economy collapse after the suppression? If Lister had overturned a totalitarian anarchist regime, why did the peasants not reap the benefit of their toil? Could it be because the collectives were essentially a spontaneous Aragonese development and supported by most of the population there? This analysis is backed up by Yaacov Oved's statement (from a paper submitted to the XII Congress of Sociology, Madrid, July 1990):

"Those who were responsible for this policy [of "freeing" the Aragon Collectivists], were convinced that the farmers would greet it joyfully because they had been coerced into joining the collectives. But they were proven wrong. Except for the rich estate owners who were glad to get their land back, most of the members of the agricultural collectives objected and lacking all motivation they were reluctant to resume the same effort of in the agricultural work. This phenomenon was so widespread that the authorities and the communist minister of agriculture were forced to retreat from their

hostile policy." [Yaacov Oved, **Communismo Libertario and Communalism in the Spanish Collectivisations (1936-1939)**]

Even in the face of Communist repression, most of the collectives kept going. This, if nothing else, proves that the collectives were popular institutions. As Yaacov Oved argues in relation to the breaking up of the collectives:

"Through the widespread reluctance of collectivists to cooperate with the new policy it became evident that most members had voluntarily joined the collectives and as soon as the policy was changed a new wave of collectives was established. However, the wheel could not be turned back. An atmosphere of distrust prevailed between the collectives and the authorities and every initiative was curtailed" [Op. Cit.]

Jose Peirats sums up the situation after the communist attack on the collectives and the legalisation of the collectives as follows:

"It is very possible that this second phase of collectivisation better reflects the sincere convictions of the members. They had undergone a sever test and those who had withstood it were proven collectivists. Yet it would be facile to label as anti-collectivists those who abandoned the collectives in this second phase. Fear, official coercion and insecurity weighed heavily in the decisions of much of the Aragonese peasantry." [Op. Cit., p. 258]

While the collectives had existed, there was a 20% increase in production (and this is compared to the pre-

war harvest which had been "*a good crop.*" [Frazer, p. 370]); after the destruction of the collectives, the economy collapsed. Hardly the result that would be expected if the collectives were forced upon an unwilling peasantry. The forced collectivisation by Stalin in Russia resulted in a famine. Only the victory of fascism made it possible to restore the so-called "natural order" of capitalist property in the Spanish countryside. The same land-owners who welcomed the Communist repression of the collectives also, we are sure, welcomed the fascists who ensured a lasting victory of property over liberty.

So, overall, the evidence suggests that the Aragon collectives, like their counterparts in the Levante, Catalonia and so on, were **popular** organisations, created by and for the rural population and, essentially, an expression of a spontaneous and popular social revolution. Claims that the anarchist militia created them by force of arms are **false**. While acts of violence **did** occur and some acts of coercion **did** take place (against C.N.T. policy, we may add) these are the exceptions to the rule. Bolloten's summary best fits the facts:

"But in spite of the cleavages between doctrine and practice that plagued the Spanish Anarchists whenever they collided with the realities of power, it cannot be overemphasized that notwithstanding the many instances of coercion and violence, the revolution of July 1936 distinguished itself from all others by the generally spontaneous and far-reaching character of its collectivist movement and by its promise of moral and spiritual renewal. Nothing like this spontaneous movement had ever occurred before" [Op. Cit., p. 78]

I.8.8 BUT DID THE SPANISH COLLECTIVES INNOVATE?

Yes. In contradiction to the old capitalist claim that no one will innovate unless private property exists, the workers and peasants exhibited much more incentive and creativity under libertarian socialism than they had under the private enterprise system. This is apparent from Gaston Leval's description of the results of collectivization in Cargagente:

"Carcagente is situated in the southern part of the province of Valencia. The climate of the region is particularly suited for the cultivation of oranges. . . . All of the socialized land, without exception, is cultivated with infinite care. The orchards are thoroughly weeded. To assure that the trees will get all the nourishment needed, the peasants are incessantly cleaning the soil. 'Before,' they told me with pride, 'all this belonged to the rich and was worked by miserably paid laborers. The land was neglected and the owners had to buy immense quantities of chemical fertilizers, although they could have gotten much better yields by cleaning the soil. . . .' With pride, they showed me trees that had been grafted to produce better fruit.

"In many places I observed plants growing in the shade of the orange trees. 'What is this?,' I asked. I learned that the Levant peasants (famous for their ingenuity) have abundantly planted potatoes among the orange groves. The peasants demonstrate more intelligence than all the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Agriculture combined. They do more than just plant potatoes. Throughout the whole region of the Levant, wherever the

soil is suitable, they grow crops. They take advantage of the four month [fallow period] in the rice fields. Had the Minister of Agriculture followed the example of these peasants throughout the Republican zone, the bread shortage problem would have been overcome in a few months." [cited in Dolgoff, **Anarchist Collectives**, p. 153].

This is just one from a multitude of examples presented in the accounts of both the industrial and rural collectives (for more see section [C.2.3](#) in which we present more examples to refute that charge that "workers' control would stifle innovation" and [I.8.6](#)). The available evidence proves that the membership of the collectives showed a keen awareness of the importance of investment and innovation in order to increase production and to make work both lighter and more interesting **and** that the collectives allowed that awareness to be expressed freely. The Spanish collectives indicate that, given the chance, everyone will take an interest in their own affairs and express a desire to use their minds to improve their surroundings. In fact, capitalism distorts what innovation exists under hierarchy by channeling it purely in how to save money and maximise investor profit, ignoring other, more important, issues.

As Gaston Leval argues, self-management encouraged innovation:

"The theoreticians and partisans of the liberal economy affirm that competition stimulates initiative and, consequently, the creative spirit and invention without which it remains dormant. Numerous observations made by the writer in the Collectives, factories and socialized

workshops permit him to take quite the opposite view. For in a Collective, in a grouping where each individual is stimulated by the wish to be of service to his fellow beings research, the desire for technical perfection and so on are also stimulated. But they also have as a consequence that other individuals join those who were first to get together. Furthermore, when, in present society, an individualist inventor discovers something, it is used only by the capitalist or the individual employing him, whereas in the case of an inventor living in a community not only is his discovery taken up and developed by others, but is immediately applied for the common good. I am convinced that this superiority would very soon manifest itself in a socialised society." [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 247]

Therefore the actual experiences of self-management in Spain supports the points made in section [1.4.11](#). Freed from hierarchy, individuals will creatively interact with the world to improve their circumstances. This is not due to "market forces" but because the human mind is an active agent and unless crushed by authority it can no more stop thinking and acting than the Earth stop revolving round the Sun. In addition, the Collectives indicate that self-management allows ideas to be enriched by discussion, as Bakunin argued:

"The greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results... the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give - such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination" [God and the State, p. 33]

The experience of self-management proved Bakunin's point that society is more intelligent than even the most intelligent individual simply because of the wealth of viewpoints, experience and thoughts contained there. Capitalism impoverishes individuals and society by its artificial boundaries and authority structures.

I.8.9 WHY, IF IT WAS SO GOOD, DID IT NOT SURVIVE?

Just because something is good does not mean that it will survive.

For example, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazi's failed but that does not mean that the uprising was a bad cause or that the Nazi regime was correct, far from it. Similarly, while the experiments in workers' self-management and communal living undertaken across Republican Spain is one of the most important social experiments in a free society ever undertaken, this cannot change the fact that Franco's forces and the Communists had access to more and better weapons.

Faced with the aggression and terrorism of Franco, and behind him the military might of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the treachery of the Communists, and the aloofness of the Western bourgeois "republics" (whose policy of "non-intervention" was strangely ignored when their citizens aided Franco) it is amazing the revolution lasted as long as it did.

This does not excuse the actions of the anarchists themselves. As is well known, the C.N.T. cooperated with the other anti-fascist parties and trade unions on the

Republican side (see [next section](#)). This cooperation led to the C.N.T. joining the anti-fascist government and "anarchists" becoming ministers of state. This cooperation, more than anything, helped ensure the defeat of the revolution.

Some anarchists still maintain that the Spanish anarchist movement had no choice and that collaboration (while having unfortunate effects) was the only choice available. This view was defended by Sam Dolgoff and finds some support in the writings of Gaston Leval, August Souchy and many other anarchists.

Most anarchists opposed collaboration at the time and most think it was a terrible mistake. This viewpoint finds its best expression in Vernon Richard's **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** and, in part, in such works as **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Pierats and **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI** by Juan Gomaz Casas as well as in a host of pamphlets and articles written by anarchists ever since.

So, regardless of how good a social system is, objective facts will overcome that experiment. Saturnino Carod (a leader of a C.N.T. Militia column at the Aragon Front) sums up the successes of the revolution as well as its objective limitations:

"Always expecting to be stabbed in the back, always knowing that if we created problems, only the enemy across the lines would stand to gain. It was a tragedy for the anarcho-syndicalist movement; but it was a tragedy for something greater - the Spanish people. For it can never be forgotten that it was the working class and peasantry which, by demonstrating their ability to run

industry and agriculture collectively, allowed the republic to continue the struggle for thirty-two months. It was they who created a war industry, who kept agricultural production increasing, who formed militias and later joined the army. Without their creative endeavour, the republic could not have fought the war..."
[**Blood of Spain**, p. 394]

I.8.10 WHAT POLITICAL LESSONS WERE LEARNED FROM THE REVOLUTION?

The most important political lesson learned from the Spanish Revolution is that a revolution cannot compromise with existing power structures.

The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of the old maxim, *"those who only make half a revolution dig their own graves."* Essentially, the most important political lesson of the Spanish Revolution is that an anarchist revolution will only succeed if it follows an anarchist path and does not seek to compromise in the name of fighting a "greater evil."

On the 20th of July, after the fascist coup had been defeated in Barcelona, the C.N.T. sent a delegation of its members to meet the leader of the Catalan Government. A plenum of C.N.T. union shop stewards, in the light of the fascist coup, agreed that libertarian communism would be "put off" until Franco had been defeated (the rank and file ignored them and collectivised their workplaces). They organised a delegation to visit the Catalan president to discuss the situation - *"The delegation. . . was intransigent . . . [e]ither Companys*

*[the Catalan president] must accept the creation of a Central Committee [of AntiFascist Militias] as the ruling organisation or the C.N.T. would **consult the rank and file and expose the real situation to the workers.** Companys backed down."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti - the people armed**, p. 216, our emphasis]

The C.N.T. committee members used their new-found influence in the eyes of Spain to unite with the leaders of other organisations/parties but not the rank and file. This process led to the creation of the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias", in which political parties as well as labour unions were represented. This committee was not made up of mandated delegates, but of representatives of existing organisations, nominated by committees. Instead of a genuine confederal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighbourhood assemblies) the C.N.T. created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, ordinary working class people expressed in their assemblies. The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored.

This first betrayal of anarchist principles led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution and the civil war. In the name of "antifascist" unity, the C.N.T. worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff *"both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 40]

To justify their collaboration, the leaders of the C.N.T.-FAI claimed not to collaborate would have lead to a civil war within the civil war. In practice, while paying lip service to the revolution, the Communists and republicans attacked the collectives, murdered anarchists, cut supplies to collectivised industries (even **war** industries) and disbanded the anarchist militias after refusing to give them weapons and ammunition (preferring to arm the Civil Guard in the rearguard in order to crush the C.N.T. and so the revolution). By collaborating, a civil war was not avoided. One occurred anyway, with the working class as its victims, as soon as the state felt strong enough.

Garcia Oliver (the first ever, and hopefully last, "anarchist" minister of justice) stated that collaboration was necessary and that the C.N.T. had *"renounc[ed] revolutionary totalitarianism, which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by anarchist and Confederal [C.N.T.] dictatorship. We had confidence in the word and in the person of a Catalan democrat"* Companys (who had in the past jailed anarchists). Which means that only by working with the state, politicians and capitalists can an anarchist revolution be truly libertarian!

However, as Vernon Richards makes clear:

"[was it] essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties that is politicians honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations?. . . All the initiative. . . was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any

stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers." [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 42]

The false dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, etc. under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union/workplace/community/militia/etc. assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in an anarchist manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a boss or politician.

In his history of the FAI, Juan Gomaz Casas (an active F.A.I. member in 1936) makes this clear:

"How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the unanimous masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions as well as. . .their political organisations in the district and communities." [Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI, p. 188]

Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees favoured "collaboration" from the top down. The leaders ignored the state and cooperated with other trade unions as well as political parties in the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. In other words, they ignored their political ideas in favour of a united front against what they considered the greater evil, namely fascism. This led the way to counter-revolution, the destruction of the militias and collectives.

In particular, the continued existence of the state ensured that economic confederalism between collectives (i.e. extending the revolution under the direction of the syndicates) could not develop naturally nor be developed far enough in all places. Due to the political compromises of the C.N.T. the tendencies to coordination and mutual aid could not develop freely (see [next section](#)).

It is clear that the defeat in Spain was due to a failure not of anarchist theory and tactics but a failure of anarchists to **apply** their theory and tactics. Instead of destroying the state, the C.N.T.-F.A.I. ignored it. For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organisations which can effectively replace the state and the market; that is, to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision-making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this route can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed.

In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which

promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority and not tyrannical to dethrone tyrants!

Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed. That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision-making about social and economic issues.

As the **Friends of Durruti** argued "*A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations.*" [*"The Friends of Durruti accuse"*, from **Class War on the Home Front**, p. 34] Only this, the creation of viable anarchist social organisations, can ensure that the state and capitalism can be destroyed and replaced with a just system based on liberty, equality and solidarity.

The second important lesson is on the nature of anti-fascism. The C.N.T. leaders were totally blinded by the question of anti-fascist unity, leading them to support a "democratic" state against a "fascist" one. While the bases of a new world was being created around them by the working class, inspiring the fight against fascism, the C.N.T. leaders collaborated with the system that spawns fascism, As the Friends of Durruti make clear, "*Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism.*" [**Class War on the Home Front**, p. 30]

To be opposed to fascism is not enough, you also have to be anti-capitalist.

In Spain, anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As the Scottish Anarchist Ethal McDonald argued at the time, "*Fascism is not something new, some*

new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name. . . Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed." [**Workers Free Press**, Oct 1937]

I.8.11 WHAT ECONOMIC LESSONS WERE LEARNED FROM THE REVOLUTION?

The most important lesson from the revolution is the fact that ordinary people took over the management of industry and did an amazing job of keeping (and improving!) production in the face of the direst circumstances. Not only did workers create a war industry from almost nothing in Catalonia, they also improved working conditions and innovated with new techniques and processes. The Spanish Revolution shows that self-management is possible.

From the point of view of individual freedom, its clear that self-management allowed previously marginalised people to take an active part in the decisions that affected them. Egalitarian organisations provided the framework for a massive increase in participation and individual self-government, which expressed itself in the extensive innovations carried out by the Collectives. The Collectives indicate, in Stirner's words, that "*[o]nly in the union can you assert yourself as unique, because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you.*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 312]

As predicted in anarchist theory, and borne out by actual experience, there exists large untapped reserves of

energy and initiative in the ordinary person which self-management can call forth. The collectives proved Kropotkin's argument that cooperative work is more productive and that if the economists wish to prove *"their thesis in favour of **private property** against all other forms of **possession**, should not the economists demonstrate that under the form of communal property land never produces such rich harvests as when the possession is private. But this they could not prove; in fact, it is the contrary that has been observed."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 146]

Therefore, five important lessons from the actual experience of a libertarian socialist economy can be derived:

Firstly, that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, but is a product of many different influences as well as the objective conditions.

The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made in the process of liberation by people themselves are always minor compared to the results of creating institutions **for** people. The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of this, with the "collectivisation decree" causing more harm than good. Luckily, the Spanish anarchists recognized the importance of having the freedom to make mistakes, as can be seen by the many different forms of collectives and federations tried.

Secondly, that self-management allowed a massive increase in innovation and new ideas.

The Spanish Revolution is clear proof of the anarchist case against hierarchy and validates Isaac Puente words

that in *"a free collective each benefits from accumulated knowledge and specialized experiences of all, and vice versa. There is a reciprocal relationship wherein information is in continuous circulation."* [cited in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 32]

Thirdly, the importance of decentralisation of management.

The woodworkers' union experience indicates that when an industry becomes centralised, the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands which leads to ordinary workers being marginalised. This can happen even in democratically run industries and soon result in apathy developing within it. This was predicted by Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists (and by many F.A.I. members in Spain at the time). While undoubtedly better than capitalist hierarchy, such democratically run industries are only close approximations to anarchist ideas of self-management. Importantly, however, the collectivisation experiments also indicate that cooperation need not imply centralisation (as can be seen from the Badelona collectives).

Fourthly, the importance of building links of solidarity between workplaces as soon as possible.

While the importance of starting production after the fascist uprising made attempts at coordination seem of secondary importance to the collectives, the competition that initially occurred between workplaces helped the state to undermine self-management. Because there was no People's Bank or other communistic body to coordinate credit and production, state control of credit

and the gold reserves made it easier for the Republican state (through its monopoly of credit) to undermine the revolution and control the collectives and (effectively) nationalise them in time (Durruti and a few others planned to seize the gold reserves but were advised not to by De Santillan).

This attack on the revolution started when the Catalan State issued a decree legalising (and so controlling) the collectives in October 1936 (the famous "Collectivisation Decree"). The counter-revolution also withheld funds for collectivised industries, even war industries, until they agreed to come under state control. The industrial organisation created by this decree was a compromise between anarchist ideas and those of other parties (particularly the communists) and in the words of Gaston Leval, *"the decree had the baneful effect of preventing the workers' syndicates from extending their gains. It set back the revolution in industry."* [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 54]

And lastly, that an economic revolution can only succeed if the existing state is destroyed. As Kropotkin argued, a new economic system requires a new political system - capitalism needs the state, socialism needs anarchy.

Due to the failure to consolidate the revolution **politically**, it was lost **economically**. The decree *"legalising collectivisation"* *"distorted everything right from the start"* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227] and helped undermine the revolution by ensuring that the mutualism of the collectives did not develop freely into libertaria communism (*"The collectives lost the economic freedom they had won at the beginning"*

due to the decree, as one participant put it. [Ronald Frazer, **Blood of Spain**, p. 230]).

As Frazer notes, it *"was doubtful that the C.N.T. had seriously envisaged collectivisation of industry. . .before this time."* [Op. Cit., p. 212] C.N.T. policy was opposed to the collectivisation decree. As an eyewitness pointed out, *"The C.N.T.'s policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* [Op. Cit., p. 213] Indeed, leading anarchists like Abad de Santillan opposed it and urged people to ignore it: *"I was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature. . .when I became councilor, I had no intention of taking into account or carrying out the decree: I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they best saw fit, according to their own inspiration."* [Op. Cit., p. 212]

However, with the revolution lost politically, the C.N.T. was soon forced to compromise and support the decree (it did propose more libertarian forms of coordination between workplaces but these were undermined by the state). A lack of effective mutual aid organisations allowed the state to gain power over the collectives and so undermine and destroy self-management. Working class control over the economy (important as it is) does not automatically destroy the state. In other words, the economic aspects of the revolution cannot be considered in isolation from its political ones.

However, these points do not diminish the successes of the Spanish revolution. Beyond doubt these months of economic liberty in Spain shows that not only that libertarian socialism **works** but that it can improve the quality of life and increase freedom. Given the time and breathing space, the experiment would undoubtedly have

ironed out its problems. Even in the very difficult environment of a civil war (and with resistance of almost all other parties and unions) the workers and peasants of Spain showed that a better society is possible.

